Rugby Union First Test: England 8 New Zealand 25

It's not all black for England

Robert Armstrong

ENGLAND'S heart-warming performance against the All Blacks last Saturday was soured by one punch Martin Johnson threw that earned the Leicester lock an immediate one-match ban.

Had England not taken swift disciplinary action against Johnson for that punch to Justin Marshall's jaw, the New Zealand management would have cited him for foul play within the stipulated 24 hours.

Clive Woodward, the England coach, and Roger Uttley, the manager, did not procrastinate. To their credit they banned Johnson from this Saturday's international against South Africa at Twickenham.

"Roger and I have watched the match video and believe the allegations against Martin Johnson are founded," said Woodward. "Martin will be making a full apology."

Marshall, the All Blacks' captain and scrum-half, said his hearing had been temporarily impaired by the sixth-minute punch which was thrown to the side of his jaw from behind. "I saw it happen clearly and I was incensed," said the New Zealand coach, John Hart. "It could have broken the captain's jaw and put him out for the rest of the tour."

Recent games between England and the All Blacks have often had an edge of violence. After the 1993 Test at Twickenham, which England won 15-9, the New Zealand forward Jamie Joseph was banned for stamping on Kyran Bracken's ankle. Earlier in the same tour Phil de Glanville, while playing at centre for the Southwest division, was raked by a New Zealand boot at the bottom of a ruck and later needed 15 stitches in an eye wound.



Gripping stuff . . . Jonah Lomu leads the charge against England at Old Trafford PHOTO: DAVID DAVIES

Johnson, a veteran of 33 internationals and the Lions captain for last summer's tour to South Africa, will be keenly missed against the Springboks, whose 52-10 victory over France in Paris last Saturday suggests that they are playing their best football since the 1995 World Cup. Saracens' Danny Grewcock is set to replace him.

Woodward will probably make further changes if Tony Diprose and Adedayo Adebayo, who were both substituted because of minor injuries, fail to prove their fitness. Mike Catt was criticised for missing three short-range penalties and a conversion, but the Bath fly-half was a tower of strength in defence, making many important tackles, and also showed plenty of fire in attack. Alex King, Woodward's original choice at No 10, is still unfit.

In any case, there was not a great deal wrong with England's committed performance that a bit of fine tuning among the three-quarters would not put right. By the later stages of this absorbing contest Lawrence Dallaglio's men had the All Blacks on the back foot, but England's option-taking in midfield was not incisive enough to produce additional scores after Catt and Austin Healey had fashioned an excellent try for De Glanville.

Dallaglio, in his second game as skipper, proved he is a world-class flanker whose inspirational example can bring the best out of his teammates. Richard Cockerill and Darren Garforth stabilised the scrum, Garath Archer and Johnson showed a prodigious work-rate in the second row, and Richard Hill was a powerhouse on the open-side. When Neil Back replaced the injured Diprose at half-time, England's rejigged back-row merely moved into a higher gear.

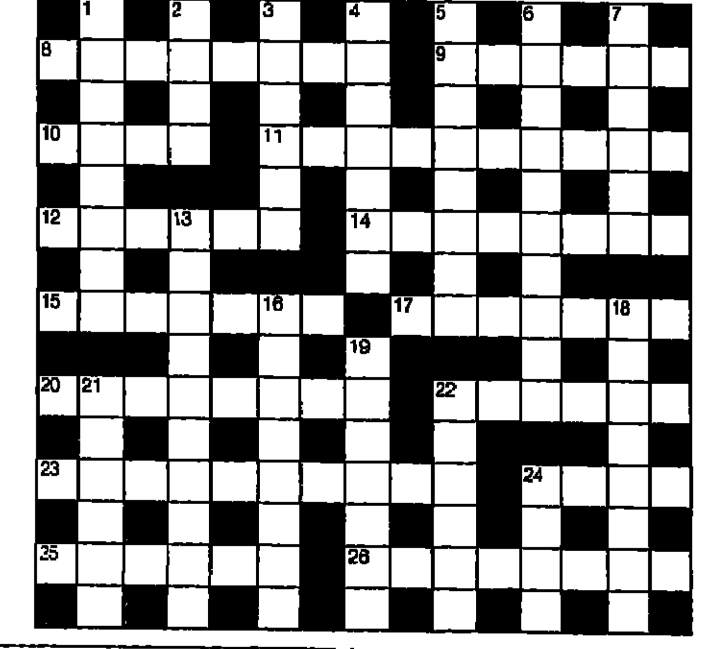
Had England not conceded two soft tries by Ian Jones and Jeff Wilson in the first quarter, when they were giving the All Blacks too much respect, not to mention space, there could have been the makings of an upset of heroic proportions.

In terms of points on the board New Zealand never came under genuine pressure — Taine Randell's short-range try on the hour put them 22-3 ahead — yet the longer the game went on the more the All Blacks began to fray at the edges and their composure ebbed away.

Little wonder that several All Blacks pointed ironically at the scoreboard as they left the field while England set out on a lap of honour before a euphoric 55,000 crowd. Woodward still has much to learn about the unforgiving business of winning a Test, but at least his unbuttoned outlook and honest-to-goodness enthusiasm have helped put a large dollop of self-belief back into his players; in the wake of a 17-point defeat that is no small achievement.

It will be fascinating to see whether England sustain their psychological edge when they meet New Zealand in the second Test at Twickenham on December 6. One suspects the tourists' sang-froid at Old Trafford was shaken from the outset by Cockerill's disruptive behaviour in face of the haka. "Totally disrespectful," complained Hart. True but that was surely what England intended.

Cryptic crossword by Crispa



Across

8 Reserve the surplus for a reader's use (8)
9 For nil outlay one might acquire such old silver (6)
10 Trainee getting assistance as set down (4)
11 The young woman with the big feet raising fruit (10)
12 Very cold beer (6)
14 Compromise, being green and undecided (8)
15 Put off — it's to do with the beans (7)
17 Many came down quite exhausted (7)
20 The capital fellow putting pounds on finished right (8)
22 Famous sailor finding wrongdoing immoral (6)
23 Progress by an employee, a skilled worker (10)
24 Turn in after the heartless fool (4)
25 A boost to the system, though that's not stressed (6)
26 Six-footers take time knotting ties (8)

Down

1 A vile lot, really rotten, may well change (8)
2 Slide for small child (4)
3 The sportsman making a boundary? (6)
4 Deletes error when so encouraged (7)
5 Propose including tip for a miscreant (8)
6 Happy in admitting nothing causes strife (10)
7 He's engaged in face treatment (6)
13 Object about inferior railing (10)
16 A few words written when there's time? (8)
18 Tested, cut up, and blasted! (8)
19 With little hesitation send out English recluse (7)
21 The city's left going in circles (6)
22 Point to a door guard (6)
24 Some people's limbs are almost stick-like (4)

Last week's solution

		A	R	C	H	D	U	C	H	E	S	S		
J		N		H		O		E		S		W		A
A	N	T	W	E	R	P		R	I	C	H	A	R	D
M		H		S		P		A		A		L		O
J	E	R	U	S	A	L	E	M		P	Y	L	O	N
A		O				E		I		A		O		I
R	A	P	E		C	R	A	C	K	D	O	W	N	S
		O		D						E		M		
R	E	P	R	E	S	S	I	V	E		H	Y	M	N
U		H		A		E		I				S		E
B	O	A	R	D		I	N	S	O	M	N	I	A	C
B		G		L		S		I		O		S		K
E	G	O	T	I	S	M		T	R	U	S	T	E	E
R		U		N		A		O		L		E		D
		S	H	E	L	L	C	R	A	T	E	R		

International: Scotland 8 Australia 37

Silence of the Scottish lambs

Robert Kitson at Murrayfield

THE Saturday night newspaper had it cruelly right. "The Shower of Scotland" is not a headline designed to cause mirth in the SRU offices but even the Murrayfield mandarins cannot ignore the red danger signals flashing all around them.

It was not so much the record margin of defeat to an Australian side scarcely weighed down by stardust, nor the hiss of punctured optimism as a young home side leaked 29 points without reply after the interval. Worse was the air of resignation around a stadium barely two-thirds full for what many hoped might be the dawn of a new era. Without a stiffening of Scotland's resolve on and off the field, the Springboks will run amok on December 6.

Many spectators were shuffling home long before John Eales converted Willie Ofahengaue's injury-time try to eclipse the 37-12 margin of the 1984 Wallabies.

Brushing the mess under the carpet will do no good and, to their credit, the Scottish management and players show no sign of deluding themselves. "I can't remember a more disappointing second-half," said Richie Dixon, the home coach. "Rugby is a simple game but our basics and decision-making were not up to scratch and we paid the price." Captain Andy Nicol agreed.

A year ago, it was 19 points from Matt Burke which scissored the Scots. This time it was the slim, elusive Stephen Larkham who applied the rapier with two unorthodox tries.

Scotland's best moment came courtesy of a gift-wrapped throw by Michael Foley to unmarked debutant Scott Murray at a line-out five metres from the visiting line. They were unlucky to lose Adam Roxburgh because of concussion but getting their injured forward trio of Rob Wainwright, Doddie Weir and Tom Smith fit is an urgent necessity.

Gregor Townsend continues to test the patience of his admirers at fly-half and 20-year-old James Craig, whose best chance to show his pace proved to be his pursuit of Joe Roff to the line for Australia's first try, will not want to dwell on his defensive performance. There is already a James Craig Walk, named after one of Edinburgh's elders, off the east end of Princes Street, but the boy racer has a long way to go before he achieves such honours in his own right.

The day's biggest cheer greeted news of England's defeat. Some priorities in Scottish rugby never change.

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The Washington Post · Le Monde

Orphans feel force of the Aids storm

Chris Holt

ON A windswept patch of wasteland in one of Lusaka's grim residential compounds, a group of small children is huddled around a woman in a tie-dyed dress. They follow her hand as she scratches numbers in the dirt, nought to three. Now and then wind picks up the dust and hurls it into the children's eyes. This is their school, the dirt their blackboard, this untrained volunteer their teacher. This is the best education they can hope for, these children orphaned by Aids.

No one in Zambia is unaffected by Aids. Everyone you speak to has lost a family member, a colleague, or a friend. If you haven't seen someone for a while, you don't ask where or how they are. And in the wake of Aids, a second human tragedy is unfurling: an "epidemic" of orphans. By the middle of last year, 9 million children worldwide had lost their mothers to Aids, according to Unaids, the joint United Nations programme on HIV and Aids. Some 90 per cent of these children are in sub-Saharan Africa and most of them will also have lost a second parent. In the most affected countries it is thought up to one-third of children will become orphans in the next 10 years.

Up to half of some countries' orphans are looked after by grandparents and many fall into the care of older siblings. The burden on these families, many of which are already very poor, is immense. Albina Mwila, at 72, has taken in six orphans. Now with a total of 12 grandchildren to look after, she struggles to feed them, farming beans, maize and groundnuts on one hectare of land. When food is scarce, she begs from neighbours.

"The hardest thing is to feed and clothe them and pay school fees," Ms Mwila says. Her orphaned grandson Joseph, whose tiny, malnourished body belies his nine years, has a persistent rash and hacking cough. When he is not at school he looks after his younger siblings and cousins. He tells the younger ones stories, cradles a crying two-year-old, and, when necessary, helps his grandmother in the undignified search for charity.

Unlike countries such as India or Thailand, in Zambia orphanages take only a very small minority of children. "Zambian tradition is that you should look after your family and orphanages should be the very last option," says Unaids's Mark Connolly.

Zambia is currently thought to have half a million orphans — 5 per cent of the total population. By 1993, 42 per cent of urban and one-third of rural households already contained orphans. For a country struggling to cope with decades of under-development and high levels of poverty, the orphans represent the seeds of future crises.

A Unicef report this year linked poor educational performance to children's trauma in coping with the sickness or death of parents. Primary school-age children were bearing enormous responsibilities of caring for dying parents, finding food and earning money. School fees, introduced as part of the 1990s shift to free-market economics in Zambia, are beyond the means of many families. Some 68 per cent of orphans in rural areas now do not go to school.

"The implications for the economy, education and health services are very serious," Mr Connolly says. "There are very high levels of HIV infection among professionals with a generation of less educated, less skilled, emotionally less secure orphans following behind when they die." The government is predicting that gross domestic product will fall by between 5 and 9 per cent by 2000, because of the effects of Aids.

Some policy changes are addressing the situation. Compulsory school uniforms have been abolished in Zambia. Churches and other local groups have set up schools in Lusaka that offer free education to the poorest. At Kabwata Open School — open to all, but also open to the air — 50 per cent of the 300 pupils are orphans. They learn using donated books, chalk and blackboards, and seven teachers are paid by overseas donors. A project in Chilonga, northern Zambia, funded by the British aid agency Cafod, is typical. There, an orphans' support group farms five hectares of land, its produce going to pay for school fees and other needs. A further two hectares of land is used to teach farming skills to the children.

"There have been plenty of projects addressing the problems of people with Aids, but at first few people were thinking about the orphans," says Cafod's Richard Miller. "This community thought it was important to bring them together and teach them the skills they need to look after themselves."

The chairwoman of the group, Emilia Kumwenda, aged 54 and herself a stand-in mother to 11 orphans, is a formidable woman who believes education is the key to the orphans' future. She runs a nursery and an anti-Aids club for older children, where they learn about the disease. "We recruit children who are not orphans as well, so they will mix and see each other as normal," she explains.

Community-based projects such as these were identified as central to non-governmental organisations' responses to HIV in southern Africa in 1994. In their Lusaka Declaration on Support to Children and Families Affected by Aids, the agencies urged that, wherever possible, children should be kept in their communities. Three years on, however, such projects are still missing out on both domestic and overseas government aid, which favours hospital-based programmes and expenditure on testing kits, and doctors' and advisers' salaries.

The "orphan epidemic" in Zambia is still in its infancy. In neighbouring Uganda, the commissioner for health, Dr Sam Okware, has talked about a "window of hope" between the ages of five and 18. "If that group can be educated, if their behaviour can be changed, I think we have a future," he says.

Ms Kumwenda's great-nephew, Dominic Mukaka, joins a group of teenage orphans shakily singing a song with a clear message about Aids, sex and self-respect. It is four years since his parents died and he and his brother joined Ms Kumwenda's disparate brood of young relatives. "I don't even think about my parents any more and I don't feel sad," says Mr Mubaba, aged 18, standing next to his great-aunt. "Now this is my mum."

Comment, page 12

No small concern . . . Young children often have to care for their brothers and sisters after their parents die PHOTOGRAPH: GIDEON MENDEL

UN warns of global epidemic by 2000

Jon Henley in Paris

MORE than 30 million people — one in 100 sexually active adults worldwide — are living with HIV, and 16,000 more become infected with the virus each day, according to a new United Nations report.

In an alarming paper published last week, the UN admitted that it had "grossly underestimated" the scale of the global Aids epidemic. A leap from 22.6 million people in 1996 partly reflects a more accurate method of collecting data, according to the Joint UN Programme on HIV/Aids and the World Health Organisation.

But it said the surge also included a 19 per cent increase in recorded cases of HIV and full-blown Aids, and warned that only one in 10 people infected with the virus that causes Aids is aware of it.

"The more we know about the Aids epidemic, the worse it appears to be," Dr Peter Piot, the executive director of the UN programme, said at the presentation of the report in Paris. "If current transmission rates hold steady, by the year 2000 the number of people living with HIV or Aids will soar to 40 million."

The report said some 2.3 million people will have died of Aids by the end of this year, a 50 per cent rise on 1996. Nearly half were women, and nearly 500,000 were children under 15.

Swiss 'must pay millions' in redemption

Richard Norton-Taylor and Owen Bennett Jones in Bern

SWITZERLAND will have to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to Holocaust victims if there is to be any chance of an "honourable closure" to the bitter controversy over the country's role in trading Nazi gold, the head of an influential Jewish organisation said this week.

Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress — in the vanguard of attacks against Switzerland's wartime record — raised the stakes on the eve of a conference in London on Nazi gold, including personal belongings looted from Jews.

Britain and the United States are expected to tell the conference that 5.5 tons of gold worth about $68 million held in the Bank of England and the Federal Reserve should be distributed to Holocaust survivors. The gold — from the residue recovered from Germany by the Allies at the end of the second world war — is legally due to 10 countries occupied by the Nazis. The US government is also expected to offer about $33 million to a fund for Holocaust victims.

As Switzerland disclosed details of its role in trading Nazi gold, Mr Bronfman said he wanted Swiss contributions "of nine to 10 figures at least". Otherwise, he warned, the Swiss might have to pay out even more — a reference to threatened lawsuits and a boycott of Swiss banks in the US.

An independent report on Monday revealed that 76 per cent of Germany's wartime gold

continued on page 4

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF80	Netherlands	G 5
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 450	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,500	Switzerland	SF 3.80

Not perfectly frank about Francophonia

JOHN RYLE says that the position of French is even worse in Cambodia than in Vietnam (Lost for words in Francophonia, November 23). As someone who has spent a few years in Cambodia, and has travelled in the region, I find that very hard to believe.

I wonder if Mr Ryle was able to spare the time to attempt an English conversation with students, however advanced, or indeed teachers from the English language schools? I have over the years known several of them. Some of them were marginally comprehensible when they spoke English, not at all when they wrote it. As I don't know much Khmer at all, the only solution was sometimes to ask them to repeat in French what they had just said in "English".

There is no doubt that English is popular, as are a few Asian languages. They are all popular for one reason: Cambodia (and especially its youth) is in the grip of a get-rich-quick mentality. English, Thai or Chinese, computer skills, powerful relatives and firearms are among the tools one may find useful in that pursuit. In this context, French hardly stands a chance. Neither do the sciences, the arts or philosophy.

Also, it is misleading to say that the Tutsis now in power in Rwanda speak English: they simply spent many years in exile in Uganda, but any who were at all educated also speak French. The French government was stupid not to switch allegiances at the right time, as the United States so skilfully did in neighbouring Zaire. There is no doubt that the previous regimes in both countries were appalling, but there are already serious questions being asked about the new, pro-Anglophone regimes. And was France — or Belgium — really Mobutu's largest sponsor?

The "imaginary empire" of Francophonia no doubt has its ridiculous aspects, as does the Commonwealth. The main difference between the imperialism of French and that of English is that the former is openly, often clumsily, supported by a government, whereas the other is carried by the market, which, as we all know, is miraculous and godly.

Finally, the comparison between the protectionist attitude in French and the laissez-faire approach in (especially non-British) English is a trifle disingenuous. English, with its huge intake of romance words, is probably unique, making it a hybrid language. As the language of Hollywood, soap operas, computers and airports, it is indeed loud. But is it that loud?
Philippe Hunt,
Brussels, Belgium

JOHN RYLE'S bemused regard of the "imaginary empire of Francophonia" seems to this expatriate Canadian the sort of indulgence in Anglo-Saxon smugness that must make the French government's encouragement of Quebec's rendezvous with destiny all the more tempting.

The opportunity to foster, on the millennial eve, the independence of a fiercely proud Francophone nation in the heartland of the empire lost two centuries ago by whim of history — what a glorious nose-thumbing it would be! What a bloody blow against English common sense!
Fraser Thorburn,
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Smoking out advertising

OF COURSE the tobacco industry's sponsorship of Formula One motor racing materially increases consumption — why else would they pour millions into the sport (Anti-tobacco drive stalls on the grid, November 16)? Of course Formula One would continue with other sponsors — other sports have ditched the cigarette companies and survived. Unfortunately the driving force here is the greed and self-interest of team owners, drivers and, in particular, Bernie Ecclestone and Max Mosley.

We know tobacco kills, therefore large amounts of money are being made out of killing Formula One's spectators. Rather than bringing a team's management to trial for negligently killing one of their drivers, perhaps all teams sponsored by tobacco companies should be indicted for the premeditated killing of their customers?

How can the retention of economic benefit in Britain be justified, knowing it will cost lives? One wonders how this sits with Prime Minister Blair's much publicised Christian ethics, especially at a time when smoking among young adults is on the increase in the UK?
Stuart Mackenzie,
Woodend, Victoria, Australia

AFTER reading Clare Longrigg's report "Ban on public smoking urged" (October 26), I just had to write and implore you not to turn Britain into a replica of the small-minded, soft-core Gestapo state that we increasingly contend with here in the United States.

Our "nanny" government decrees that even in mammoth skyscrapers, smokers are not given one room in which to puff away but must huddle outside in the elements.

Still, smoking seems to be on the increase as a "rebellious" activity, especially among young teenagers, and a whole new phenomenon, upscale cigar bars, have come in to vogue.

To say nothing of the irony that in the midst of all this alarm, putatively over the purity of the air, the US continues, as your November 2 issue so assiduously outlined, to produce more and more of the greenhouse gases that could spell the demise of the entire planet. Yet there's not even a hint of a campaign to discourage auto emissions or encourage alternatives.
Sally Jurb,
Westbury, New York, USA

Trouble over Montserrat

THE disgraceful conditions endured by many of the 4,000 diehards unwilling or unable to leave the volcano-stricken island of Montserrat have received a good deal of media attention in recent months; but not much concern has been shown for the 7,000 exiles driven out soon after the eruption began (Britain blamed for volcano 'fiasco', November 9). Have they ceased to be Britain's responsibility?

Montserrat was a close-knit community; its citizens had a strong and distinct identity. Their island had few resources except its natural beauty, but its people had invested their savings in building up the local economy, and now they have lost everything.

Scattered from Trinidad to Toronto, their homes and livelihoods destroyed by the volcano, members of the Montserrat diaspora wonder if they will ever see their homeland again. Many of them left Montserrat early in 1996 at their own expense, seeking refuge with friends and relatives in other islands for what they imagined would be a few months at most. Now it seems that the UK government is reluctant to accept any further responsibility for their welfare.

Presumably if they returned to Montserrat, the refugees could take advantage of Britain's somewhat grudging offer of temporary residence in the UK. However, hopes that the caring government of New Labour might show more sensitivity to the plight of Montserrat's exiles can't have been raised by the news that those who came to Britain but had nowhere to stay were to be dispersed around the country wherever there was spare local authority housing. Quite apart from the likelihood that availability of local authority housing shows a strong negative correlation with availability of jobs, the prospect of life in an alien land isolated from one's compatriots hardly sounds cheering.

It is high time the UK government made it clear, by deeds and not just words, that it recognises its responsibility for all Montserratians, as individuals and as a society. Otherwise, thousands will continue to drift from country to country, leaving a trail of disillusionment and bitterness. And when the eruption is finally over, the task of rebuilding Montserratian society will not be made easier by the return of a disparate assortment of resentful misfits.
Barbara Welch,
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Driven by consumption

ANOTHER way to look at the United States — 5 per cent of the world's population, consuming 33 per cent of the world's resources and generating 25 per cent of the carbon dioxide — is that it is doing a very good thing indeed in the context of the world's economy, which is wholly dependent on the purchasing capacity of the US consumer.

Which country or economic grouping is prepared to accept a 20 per cent or 40 per cent or even 60 per cent reduction in exports to the US? How effective would the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund or the plethora of international aid programmes be without access to the financial support of the US?

In order to stop excessive consumption and excess waste generation, the golden goose must be throttled. But a dead goose cannot lay golden eggs. When times get tough in the international markets just reduce your prices and dump product on the US consumer. That is what the European Union and Japan do, and have done, and what the wounded tigers of the Pacific rim hope to do now.

The only proven economic model that will dramatically reduce resource consumption, which will effectively curtail pollution, is a worldwide, deep, deep economic depression, with its attendant social dislocations.

Wound the US consumer, and we may all end up with our economic throats cut.
Richard Boisvert,
Marlboro, New Hampshire, USA

Briefly

GERMANY'S president, Roman Herzog, launched an oblique attack on Chancellor Helmut Kohl's immigration policies a day after Kohl killed an attempt to give immigrant children born in Germany dual citizenship until the age of 18 (November 23).

Germany is the only major Western nation that bases citizenship on blood lines, a situation reminiscent of the racial policies of the Third Reich. There is a relationship between the Zionist concept of the Jews as "God's chosen race" and the National Socialist doctrine of the Germans as *das Herrenvolk* — the master race — simply because both are élitist notions.

The Scots have always known that both propositions are quite absurd because they have for ever been "God's chosen people". But then the Scots have no difficulty in laughing at themselves.
John N Burry,
Adelaide, South Australia

WHEN discussing native whaling, Anne Swardson says that Russian Chukchi Indians are "poor enough to actually plan to eat what they caught" (November 2). This strikes me as a very condescending and ignorant attitude towards native cultures. There are many reasons why natives and non-natives choose to eat wild meat, beyond poverty. In my opinion, eating wild meat is healthier, more humane and environmentally friendly than eating farm-reared meat. And for the most part it tastes better, too.
David Moseley,
Dawson Creek, BC, Canada

THERE certainly was reason for native Americans to "Run, Columbus is coming" (November 16). However, if we non-native Americans want to depict their need to flee in a fanciful way, why choose the slow-moving horse, which was not in America in 1492? Better to dramatise the urgency for these murdered and maligned people "to get out of town fast" by showing them boarding a 747 at La Guardia airport.
Donald S Waters,
Dominguez Hills, California, USA

THE author of the obituary on Isaiah Berlin (November 16) informs us that Berlin wrote "a marvellously lucid and judicious" book about Karl Marx that "ignored Marxism and international communism".

The workings of the academic mind never cease to amaze! Is it too much to hope that in the fullness of time one of our intellectual friends will write a lucid and judicious book about Jesus Christ that ignores Christianity and the Christian church?
Roy Atkins,
Sompting, West Sussex

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Last chance to slow down Earth's heating

Patrick Wintour, and Ed Vulliamy in Washington

IT HAS been hailed as the last great environmental battle of the century. Nearly 10,000 politicians, scientists, business lobbyists and environmentalists from 160 countries started to gather last weekend in the Japanese city of Kyoto for a 10-day conference that will try to agree to slow global warming.

If successful, the conference will set new parameters for the economies of the 21st century. If, like most previous United Nations conferences on climate change, its agreements are subsequently ignored by its signatories, the world will go on warming and, in the words of the British Environment Minister, Michael Meacher, "we will have wilfully taken an incalculable risk with our planet".

Mr Meacher and Britain's Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, believe a deal can be reached. In part this optimism is because Mr Prescott has invested so much in success. He has spent 10 days deploying his blunt negotiating skills in Japan, Australia, New Zealand and India in the hope of bridging the gap between vastly different proposals to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 2010.

Close observers such as Michael Grubb, director of energy and environment at Chatham House in London, the independent think-tank, concede that Kyoto comes at the end of a trail of disappointing UN conferences, including the Rio Summit in 1992, and climate change conferences in Berlin in 1995 and Geneva in 1996. Goals were repeatedly set, only to be repeatedly missed.

Mr Grubb concedes that Kyoto has one distinguishing feature that gives cause for optimism. "The intention is to set legally binding targets on emissions. It will therefore set the legal standard from which all future targets will be set. The model is the Montreal protocol on ozone depletion, an agreement that has worked."

For once countries will have to follow their promises with action, or face legal sanctions in their own or international courts.

The task for the Japanese chairman will be to find a consensus from vastly disparate opening positions. The simple description is that the European Union is the good guy and President Bill Clinton, head of the world's biggest polluter, the weak bad guy unable to stand up to his domestic lobby. The truth is more complex.

Certainly, in March, led by Germany and Britain's then environment secretary, John Gummer, the EU agreed to propose a 15 per cent cut by 2010, although within the EU some countries, such as Portugal, will be permitted to increase emissions by 40 per cent. The United States is responsible for 25 per cent of world emissions. Mr Clinton has offered to cut emissions to 1990 levels by 2008-2012, in effect an admission that the US made promises at Rio that it has failed to keep.

Nevertheless, stabilisation would involve big changes in the US, since its population is rising fast and, without a change in policy, emissions are due to rise by as much as 30 per cent.

There are worse offenders than the US. Australia, with 80 per cent of its exports — especially coal — contributing to global warming in some way, says it should be allowed to increase emissions by as much as Portugal. Partly because of pressure from Mr Prescott, this has now been scaled down to an 18 per cent increase to 2010.

Japan, as host nation, is desperate for a deal and is looking for a cut of around 2.5 per cent, with exceptions for countries with high population growth and low per capita emission increases.

The big task is to find a means of bridging the gap between the EU and the US. The EU looks the most likely to blink first. It is already reportedly scaling the proposed worldwide cut from 15 to 10 per cent, while Germany is backing plans to allow the US to implement its emissions cuts flexibly. This would allow the US to gain extra time from countries that have made progress.

The US also wants "joint implementation", in which a country with advanced technology works to bring down greenhouse gas emissions in a less developed country and claims that reduction as part of its own target.

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India's coalition falls as Congress pulls the plug

INDIA'S prime minister, I K Gujral, stepped down last week after the Congress party carried out its threat to withdraw support from his governing coalition and stake its own claim to power, *writes Suzanne Goldenberg.*

"We have withdrawn support to the . . . government under I K Gujral. We have communicated this to the president," the Congress leader, Sitaram Kesri, said. His announcement, presaging the end of Mr Gujral's seven-month-old government, had been expected. Although the Congress was not a member of the coalition, its support gave the United Front a majority in parliament.

Mr Kesri said the Congress would seek to form a government, but the move seems more likely to result in fresh elections, expected in February. The rightwing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party also staked its claim to form a government. The BJP, which has only held power once — for just 12 days in 1996 — threatens to stir up historic antagonisms between Hindus and Muslims.

Mr Gujral met the president, K R Narayanan, after announcing that he would offer his resignation. But he arrived armed with written assurances from the 15 regional and leftwing parties in his United Front that they would not support a Congress-led government.

Mr Gujral's government was the third since inconclusive general elections in April and May last year. None of India's political leaders had wanted elections, and Mr Kesri's move was seen as the result of brinkmanship that galloped beyond the control of the octogenarian leader.

A showdown between the Congress and the United Front had been expected for days after Mr Kesri demanded that Mr Gujral expel a Tamil party from his coalition.

A judicial inquiry had implicated the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham in the assassination of the former prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, by a Tamil Tiger suicide bomber six years ago. Leaders of the Congress and other political parties were also implicated, but Mr Kesri has focused exclusively on the Tamil party's role.

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Army waits as Pakistan rulers squabble

Suzanne Goldenberg in Islamabad

THE three key figures of Pakistan's civil establishment were locked on a collision course this week as an unrepentant prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, accused the president and the chief justice of conspiring against the people.

Mr Sharif's threat of a fight to the finish against his foes — the chief justice, Sajjad Ali Shah, and President Farooq Leghari — intensifies the confrontation that has paralysed the country for the past few weeks.

Pakistan neared constitutional breakdown on Tuesday when top judges suspended the chief justice, who refused to accept his removal and signed a court order declaring it void. It was not known what authority the order had.

A 10-judge bench of dissident Supreme Court judges said it upheld petitions challenging Mr Shah's position on the technicality that he was not the most senior judge in the country when he was appointed in 1994.

The army, which has ruled Pakistan for half of its 50 years, remained a silent spectator in the latest in a series of constitutional clashes that have prompted a mutiny in the supreme court. But as efforts to seek a compromise failed again, there were fears its patience might run out.

Amid speculation that the army might seize control to end the feud, the chief of staff, General Jehangir Karamat, held emergency talks with President Leghari.

After a weekend during which the three protagonists in the constitutional feud traded angry letters in the capital Islamabad, the army leadership — the prevailing power in Pakistan — was closeted in a meeting at its headquarters in neighbouring Rawalpindi.

Although the military has historically been the enemy of elected government, the army chief has now been cast as an unlikely arbiter in the constitutional crisis that may lead to the removal of the chief justice, the president, or even Mr Sharif.

Rolls of barbed wire and police in riot gear surrounded the supreme court, guarding against more violence after leaders of the ruling party led a rampage through the court last week, sending judges into flight and forcing the halt of the trial of the prime minister for contempt of court.

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France	10.01-10.02	9.82-9.83
Germany	2.9930-2.9947	2.9355-2.9364
Hong Kong	13.02-13.02	13.07-13.08
Ireland	1.1462-1.1471	1.1263-1.1286
Italy	2,929-2,933	2,877-2,881
Japan	217.64-217.84	214.32-214.62
Netherlands	3.3728-3.3751	3.3085-3.3115
New Zealand	2.7601-2.7641	2.7102-2.7140
Norway	12.21-12.21	11.93-11.94
Portugal	305.68-306.11	299.39-299.91
Spain	253.01-253.22	247.96-248.27
Sweden	13.14-13.16	12.79-12.81
Switzerland	2.4121-2.4146	2.3756-2.3780
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Not perfectly frank about Francophonia

JOHN RYLE says that the position of French is even worse in Cambodia than in Vietnam (Lost for words in Francophonia, November 23). As someone who has spent a few years in Cambodia, and has travelled in the region, I find that very hard to believe.

I wonder if Mr Ryle was able to spare the time to attempt an English conversation with students, however advanced, or indeed teachers from the English language schools? I have over the years known several of them. Some of them were marginally comprehensible when they spoke English, not at all when they wrote it. As I don't know much Khmer at all, the only solution was sometimes to ask them to repeat in French what they had just said in "English".

There is no doubt that English is popular, as are a few Asian languages. They are all popular for one reason: Cambodia (and especially its youth) is in the grip of a get-rich-quick mentality. English, Thai or Chinese, computer skills, powerful relatives and firearms are among the tools one may find useful in that pursuit. In this context, French hardly stands a chance. Neither do the sciences, the arts or philosophy.

Also, it is misleading to say that the Tutsis now in power in Rwanda speak English: they simply spent many years in exile in Uganda, but any who were at all educated also speak French. The French government was stupid not to switch allegiances at the right time, as the United States so skilfully did in neighbouring Zaire. There is no doubt that the previous regimes in both countries were appalling, but there are already serious questions being asked about the new, pro-Anglophone regimes. And was France — or Belgium — really Mobutu's largest sponsor?

The "imaginary empire" of Francophonia no doubt has its ridiculous aspects, as does the Commonwealth. The main difference between the imperialism of French and that of English is that the former is openly, often clumsily, supported by a government, whereas the other is carried by the market, which, as we all know, is miraculous and godly.

Finally, the comparison between the protectionist attitude in French and the laissez-faire approach in (especially non-British) English is a trifle disingenuous. English, with its huge intake of romance words, is probably unique, making it a hybrid language. As the language of Hollywood, soap operas, computers and airports, it is indeed loud. But is it that loud?
Philippe Hunt,
Brussels, Belgium

JOHN RYLE'S bemused regard of the "imaginary empire of Francophonia" seems to this expatriate Canadian the sort of indulgence in Anglo-Saxon smugness that must make the French government's encouragement of Quebec's rendezvous with destiny all the more tempting.

The opportunity to foster, on the millennial eve, the independence of a fiercely proud Francophone nation in the heartland of the empire lost two centuries ago by whim of history — what a glorious nose-thumbing it would be! What a bloody blow against English common sense!
Fraser Thorburn,
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Smoking out advertising

OF COURSE the tobacco industry's sponsorship of Formula One motor racing materially increases consumption — why else would they pour millions into the sport (Anti-tobacco drive stalls on the grid, November 16)? Of course Formula One would continue with other sponsors — other sports have ditched the cigarette companies and survived. Unfortunately the driving force here is the greed and self-interest of team owners, drivers and, in particular, Bernie Ecclestone and Max Mosley.

We know tobacco kills, therefore large amounts of money are being made out of killing Formula One's spectators. Rather than bringing a team's management to trial for negligently killing one of their drivers, perhaps all teams sponsored by tobacco companies should be indicted for the premeditated killing of their customers?

How can the retention of economic benefit in Britain be justified, knowing it will cost lives? One wonders how this sits with Prime Minister Blair's much publicised Christian ethics, especially at a time when smoking among young adults is on the increase in the UK?
Stuart Mackenzie,
Woodend, Victoria, Australia

AFTER reading Clare Longrigg's report "Ban on public smoking urged" (October 26), I just had to write and implore you not to turn Britain into a replica of the small-minded, soft-core Gestapo state that we increasingly contend with here in the United States.

Our "nanny" government decrees that even in mammoth skyscrapers, smokers are not given one room in which to puff away but must huddle outside in the elements.

Still, smoking seems to be on the increase as a "rebellious" activity, especially among young teenagers, and a whole new phenomenon, upscale cigar bars, have come in to vogue.

To say nothing of the irony that in the midst of all this alarm, putatively over the purity of the air, the US continues, as your November 2 issue so assiduously outlined, to produce more and more of the greenhouse gases that could spell the demise of the entire planet. Yet there's not even a hint of a campaign to discourage auto emissions or encourage alternatives.
Sally Jurb,
Westbury, New York, USA

Trouble over Montserrat

THE disgraceful conditions endured by many of the 4,000 diehards unwilling or unable to leave the volcano-stricken island of Montserrat have received a good deal of media attention in recent months; but not much concern has been shown for the 7,000 exiles driven out soon after the eruption began (Britain blamed for volcano 'fiasco', November 9). Have they ceased to be Britain's responsibility?

Montserrat was a close-knit community; its citizens had a strong and distinct identity. Their island had few resources except its natural beauty, but its people had invested their savings in building up the local economy, and now they have lost everything.

Scattered from Trinidad to Toronto, their homes and livelihoods destroyed by the volcano, members of the Montserrat diaspora wonder if they will ever see their homeland again. Many of them left Montserrat early in 1996 at their own expense, seeking refuge with friends and relatives in other islands for what they imagined would be a few months at most. Now it seems that the UK government is reluctant to accept any further responsibility for their welfare.

Presumably if they returned to Montserrat, the refugees could take advantage of Britain's somewhat grudging offer of temporary residence in the UK. However, hopes that the caring government of New Labour might show more sensitivity to the plight of Montserrat's exiles can't have been raised by the news that those who came to Britain but had nowhere to stay were to be dispersed around the country wherever there was spare local authority housing. Quite apart from the likelihood that availability of local authority housing shows a strong negative correlation with availability of jobs, the prospect of life in an alien land isolated from one's compatriots hardly sounds cheering.

It is high time the UK government made it clear, by deeds and not just words, that it recognises its responsibility for all Montserratians, as individuals and as a society. Otherwise, thousands will continue to drift from country to country, leaving a trail of disillusionment and bitterness. And when the eruption is finally over, the task of rebuilding Montserratian society will not be made easier by the return of a disparate assortment of resentful misfits.
Barbara Welch,
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Driven by consumption

ANOTHER way to look at the United States — 5 per cent of the world's population, consuming 33 per cent of the world's resources and generating 25 per cent of the carbon dioxide — is that it is doing a very good thing indeed in the context of the world's economy, which is wholly dependent on the purchasing capacity of the US consumer.

Which country or economic grouping is prepared to accept a 20 per cent or 40 per cent or even 60 per cent reduction in exports to the US? How effective would the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund or the plethora of international aid programmes be without access to the financial support of the US?

In order to stop excessive consumption and excess waste generation, the golden goose must be throttled. But a dead goose cannot lay golden eggs. When times get tough in the international markets just reduce your prices and dump product on the US consumer. That is what the European Union and Japan do, and have done, and what the wounded tigers of the Pacific rim hope to do now.

The only proven economic model that will dramatically reduce resource consumption, which will effectively curtail pollution, is a worldwide, deep, deep economic depression, with its attendant social dislocations.

Wound the US consumer, and we may all end up with our economic throats cut.
Richard Boisvert,
Marlboro, New Hampshire, USA

Briefly

GERMANY'S president, Roman Herzog, launched an oblique attack on Chancellor Helmut Kohl's immigration policies a day after Kohl killed an attempt to give immigrant children born in Germany dual citizenship until the age of 18 (November 23).

Germany is the only major Western nation that bases citizenship on blood lines, a situation reminiscent of the racial policies of the Third Reich. There is a relationship between the Zionist concept of the Jews as "God's chosen race" and the National Socialist doctrine of the Germans as *das Herrenvolk* — the master race — simply because both are élitist notions.

The Scots have always known that both propositions are quite absurd because they have for ever been "God's chosen people". But then the Scots have no difficulty in laughing at themselves.
John N Burry,
Adelaide, South Australia

WHEN discussing native whaling, Anne Swardson says that Russian Chukchi Indians are "poor enough to actually plan to eat what they caught" (November 2). This strikes me as a very condescending and ignorant attitude towards native cultures. There are many reasons why natives and non-natives choose to eat wild meat, beyond poverty. In my opinion, eating wild meat is healthier, more humane and environmentally friendly than eating farm-reared meat. And for the most part it tastes better, too.
David Moseley,
Dawson Creek, BC, Canada

THERE certainly was reason for native Americans to "Run, Columbus is coming" (November 16). However, if we non-native Americans want to depict their need to flee in a fanciful way, why choose the slow-moving horse, which was not in America in 1492? Better to dramatise the urgency for these murdered and maligned people "to get out of town fast" by showing them boarding a 747 at La Guardia airport.
Donald S Waters,
Dominguez Hills, California, USA

THE author of the obituary on Isaiah Berlin (November 16) informs us that Berlin wrote "a marvellously lucid and judicious" book about Karl Marx that "ignored Marxism and international communism".

The workings of the academic mind never cease to amaze! Is it too much to hope that in the fullness of time one of our intellectual friends will write a lucid and judicious book about Jesus Christ that ignores Christianity and the Christian church?
Roy Atkins,
Sompting, West Sussex

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e-mail: weekly@guardian.co.uk

Last chance to slow down Earth's heating

Patrick Wintour, and
Ed Vulliamy in Washington

IT HAS been hailed as the last great environmental battle of the century. Nearly 10,000 politicians, scientists, business lobbyists and environmentalists from 160 countries started to gather last weekend in the Japanese city of Kyoto for a 10-day conference that will try to agree to slow global warming.

If successful, the conference will set new parameters for the economies of the 21st century. If, like most previous United Nations conferences on climate change, its agreements are subsequently ignored by its signatories, the world will go on warming and, in the words of the British Environment Minister, Michael Meacher, "we will have wilfully taken an incalculable risk with our planet".

Mr Meacher and Britain's Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, believe a deal can be reached. In part this optimism is because Mr Prescott has invested so much in success. He has spent 10 days deploying his blunt negotiating skills in Japan, Australia, New Zealand and India in the hope of bridging the gap between vastly different proposals to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 2010.

Close observers such as Michael Grubb, director of energy and environment at Chatham House in London, the independent think-tank, concede that Kyoto comes at the end of a trail of disappointing UN conferences, including the Rio Summit in 1992, and climate change conferences in Berlin in 1995 and Geneva in 1996. Goals were repeatedly set, only to be repeatedly missed.

Mr Grubb concedes that Kyoto has one distinguishing feature that gives cause for optimism. "The intention is to set legally binding targets on emissions. It will therefore set the legal standard from which all future targets will be set. The model is the Montreal protocol on ozone depletion, an agreement that has worked."

For once countries will have to follow their promises with action, or face legal sanctions in their own or international courts.

The task for the Japanese chairman will be to find a consensus from vastly disparate opening positions. The simple description is that the European Union is the good guy and President Bill Clinton, head of the world's biggest polluter, the weak bad guy unable to stand up to his domestic lobby. The truth is more complex.

Certainly, in March, led by Germany and Britain's then environment secretary, John Gummer, the EU agreed to propose a 15 per cent cut by 2010, although within the EU some countries, such as Portugal, will be permitted to increase emissions by 40 per cent. The United States is responsible for 25 per cent of world emissions. Mr Clinton has offered to cut emissions to 1990 levels by 2008-2012, in effect an admission that the US made promises at Rio that it has failed to keep.

Nevertheless, stabilisation would involve big changes in the US, since its population is rising fast and, without a change in policy, emissions are due to rise by as much as 30 per cent.

There are worse offenders than the US. Australia, with 80 per cent of its exports — especially coal — contributing to global warming in some way, says it should be allowed to increase emissions by as much as Portugal. Partly because of pressure from Mr Prescott, this has now been scaled down to an 18 per cent increase to 2010.

Japan, as host nation, is desperate for a deal and is looking for a cut of around 2.5 per cent, with exceptions for countries with high population growth and low per capita emission increases.

The big task is to find a means of bridging the gap between the EU and the US. The EU looks the most likely to blink first. It is already reportedly scaling the proposed worldwide cut from 15 to 10 per cent, while Germany is backing plans to allow the US to implement its emissions cuts flexibly. This would allow the US to gain extra time from countries that have made progress.

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Video lands Basque separatists in jail

Adela Gooch in Madrid

SPAIN'S supreme court this week handed out prison sentences to the leaders of Herri Batasuna, the political wing of the Basque separatist group ETA, in a watershed judgment that could make the organisation rethink its hardline strategy.

Each of the 23 people who make up the leadership committee of Herri Batasuna (HB) received a seven-year sentence after the court found them guilty of "collaborating with an armed band". It will be the first time that members of the legally constituted party have been jailed for co-operating with ETA.

The case centred on a video featuring masked ETA guerrillas carrying guns, which HB tried to show in party political broadcasts aired during last year's general election campaign.

The court also fined the 23 leaders 500,000 pesetas ($3,400) each but cleared them of encouraging terrorist acts in statements made after ETA assassinations.

HB condemned the verdict as "barbaric" and called for a general strike in the Basque region on December 15. The party's spokesman, Floren Aoiz, warned of "serious direct consequences", and government officials said the security forces were on alert for the possibility of violent retaliation by ETA.

The party's lawyers said they would appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, alleging violation of the right to freedom of speech. The leaders must go to prison anyway this week although they may be released on bail.

The sentence follows a radical change of approach towards HB, which has been tolerated in the past because politicians hoped conciliation might draw the party, and its 12 per cent of Basque votes, away from violence towards mainstream nationalism.

The convictions became the main focus of a Franco-Spanish summit which opened in Salamanca on Monday, where the French president, Jacques Chirac, and the Spanish prime minister, José Maria Aznar, welcomed the sentences. Interior ministers pledged to tighten the noose around ETA's neck by further improving co-operation to fight the guerrillas.

Since coming to power last year, the conservative government of Mr Aznar has adopted a get-tough policy. He has intensified police action and scrapped informal contacts with ETA, insisting that only an unconditional ceasefire can lead to talks.

Last month, the organisation appeared to announce a partial truce. It said it was suspending its campaign against the dispersal of 500 ETA convicts in jails around the country — used as an excuse for the murder of a local politician in July which particularly outraged Spaniards.

The choice of new HB leaders will be a further sign of whether it might be shifting away from violence and towards talks.

In last year's election, HB won just over 180,000 votes, down from 200,000 in 1993.

PM threatens Aboriginal land rights

Christopher Zinn in Sydney

AUSTRALIA'S prime minister, John Howard, refused to back down or compromise on his tough stand against Aboriginal land rights last weekend, raising fears that he could call a snap general election on racial lines. In his first televised address to the nation Mr Howard pleaded for a swift political resolution of the fiery argument over extending native land tenure to the vast grazing properties of the outback.

But Aboriginal leaders said his Liberal-National party coalition deserved to be thrown out of office if it decided to go to the country on the divisive issue of race.

The prime minister made his surprise speech in a bid to regain control of the debate which, a year after a controversial decision by the High Court in Canberra, entered a crucial phase this week with a key bill before the senate.

Feelings are running high. Aboriginals say Mr Howard's Native Title Amendment Bill — which seeks to give farmers and miners greater security from land claims — could derail the process of reconciliation between black and white Australians.

The government has warned that unless the complex issue — which polls show most Australians do not understand — is clarified, even suburban homes with freehold title could be liable to claims.

The last such prime ministerial address was given by Paul Keating four years ago, just before parliament passed the historic Mabo bill recognising native title for the first time.

The new form of tenure emerged when the court threw out the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*, or empty lands, which the explorer Captain Cook used to claim Australia for the British Crown in the 1770s.

Native title allowed indigenous people access to land for hunting, fishing, camping and ceremonies if they could prove an unbroken and traditional link with an area.

Mr Howard said last weekend that the recent high court decision extended the original legislation in a way no one had foreseen; farmers had to be guaranteed the right to work the land without the veto of any claimants.

Mrs Mandela mired by new evidence

David Beresford in Johanessburg

ALLEGATIONS of death threats to lawyers and interference with witnesses, as well as a tangle of contradictory evidence, this week deepened the scandal surrounding Winnie Mandela's hearings before South Africa's truth commission.

In a startling development, a member of the commission accused Albertina Sisulu — wife of the former African National Congress deputy leader, Walter Sisulu — of covering up details of Mrs Mandela's alleged involvement in the murder of a doctor. New evidence also emerged linking Mrs Mandela with the disappearance of two more youths who are presumed to have been murdered.

The sixth day of the inquiry focused on the killing of Abu-Baker Asvat, the Soweto doctor alleged to have been murdered on Mrs Mandela's instructions to cover up the murder of the teenager Stompie Seipei.

The two convicted killers in the Asvat case — who have claimed they carried out the murder on a contract issued by Mrs Mandela — were brought from prison to the hearing. But one failed to appear and was hospitalised, reportedly suffering from "dehydration". The gunman who fired the fatal shots did testify, but only after Bishop Desmond Tutu, the chairman of the commission, had promised protection for his family.

Cyril Mbatha and Thulani Dlamini were sentenced to death for the 1989 murder of Dr Asvat after a supreme court judge had found that they shot the popular doctor dead in his Soweto clinic during a robbery. But his brother, Ibrahim, told the commission that the family had never accepted robbery as the motive.

He said they had discovered after the trial that Dlamini had made a statement claiming Mrs Mandela had provided the gun and promised them 20,000 rand ($4,200) to commit the murder. But police had refused to pursue the charge.

Mrs Sisulu then caused a sensation when she denied having filled in an appointment card showing that Mrs Mandela had visited Dr Asvat at the surgery in December 1988, shortly before he was killed. The card is crucial, because it contradicts Mrs Mandela's alibi that she was away from Soweto on that date when Stompie was savagely beaten up at her house.

In a BBC interview Mrs Sisulu had said emphatically that she had filled in the card. But on Monday she said that it was not her handwriting.



Bishop Desmond Tutu, chairman of South Africa's truth commission, takes a break PHOTO: ADIL BRADLOW

Havel stalls after Czech PM quits

Kate Connolly in Prague

PRESIDENT Vaclav Havel last weekend postponed forming a government for two weeks, after a meeting of Czech coalition party leaders ended in disarray in the wake of the resignation of Vaclav Klaus as prime minister.

Mr Klaus, a free-market disciple of Margaret Thatcher, had been hailed for his zealous economic transformation of the post-communist Czech Republic. He was central Europe's longest-serving prime minister, with five years in office.

He offered to resign with his three-party coalition government amid mounting allegations of corruption. President Havel, who had urged him to go, quickly accepted the offer.

The president postponed the discussions about who will take over to allow Mr Klaus's fractious Civic Democratic Party (ODS) time to elect a new leader.

A defiant Mr Klaus told a joint press conference that it had been a "forced resignation", and he maintained his innocence. But in a radio broadcast later, President Havel made it clear he believed the former prime minister had lied, and that Mr Klaus had known about slush funds used to push through his government's privatisation deals.

A caretaker government of independent technocrats could now take over — an idea supported by the president. Mr Havel's presidential role is mainly ceremonial, but he is seen as an invaluable moral arbiter in the crisis.

Mr Klaus, aged 56, said he would stay on as leader of the ODS until an extraordinary party conference decides his fate. The party is accused of accepting more than $230,000 in 1995 from a former tennis player, Milan Srejber, who wanted to buy a state ironworks that he headed. His bid for the works succeeded.

Party records uncovered by journalists concealed Mr Srejber's identity. They listed the donors of the money as a Hungarian, who has been dead for 15 years, and a cash-strapped businessman from Mauritius, who has never heard of Mr Klaus's party.

It is also claimed that the party had a secret Swiss bank account containing a fortune given by satisfied winners of privatisation contests. The commercial station TV Nova claimed last weekend that Mr Klaus and his wife Livia used some of the money to buy a villa in Davos. Mr Klaus is threatening to sue the station for libel.

Comment, page 12

Swiss 'must pay millions'

Continued from page 1

transactions went through Switzerland. It found that Swiss private banks handled three times more Nazi gold than previously thought. "It underlines how important the financial role of Switzerland was before, after, and during the war," said Jean-François Bergier, the head of an independent panel of historians set up after fierce criticism of the country's wartime role.

The Swiss National Bank bought $389.2 million of Nazi gold (worth about $3 billion in today's prices) while private Swiss banks took in about $61 million (now $570 million).

The Bergier report also said Nazi Germany seized $146 million (about $1.2 billion today) in gold from Holocaust victims and others. It said Nazi gold stolen or confiscated from individuals included at least $2.5 million ($29 million today) seized by the SS from inmates of Auschwitz and other death camps.

Switzerland's wartime government also used Allied funds — intended to aid British and American prisoners of war — to repatriate Swiss money from Japan, according to recently declassified US National Security Agency documents.

Swiss banks have set up a $190 million fund for Nazi victims, mainly Jews, as a "moral gesture".

Linus Von Castlemur, the secretary of the Bergier commission, denied that Switzerland's dealings with Hitler's Germany helped to prolong the war.

Other governments, including that of Israel, want the three-day conference to assist in the search for "truth and justice" — including opening archives in countries where they are still closed.

From doctor to dictator

OBITUARY
Hastings Banda

THE Church of Scotland must be glad that its links with former President Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, who has died in his 90s, were severed some time ago. There will be no need for undue expressions of regret at the passing of this erstwhile "lapsed" elder of the kirk, the modest doctor metamorphosed by power into a dictator, who ruled his one-party state through terror and bloodshed for three decades until ousted in 1994.

Yet there is no gainsaying his Scottish connections. In what was then Nyasaland, he was given his early education by the Presbyterians at the Livingstonia mission, named after the Scottish explorer; he completed his medical studies at Glasgow and Edinburgh universities; he always favoured Scots for educational posts in Malawi; and among his proudest moments was being at Balmoral with the Queen during a state visit to Britain.

The Malawian hagiographies say Banda was born in 1906. But 1902 or 1898 are more likely. His mother was a servant for the Scottish missionaries in Kasungu, where he was born, but he was always reticent about his father.

After a few years of education he set off on foot towards Rhodesia and South Africa to seek his fortune. The young Banda worked for 10 years in the South African gold mines. At night he studied. By 1925 he had saved enough money to buy a steamer ticket to the United States, to take up a scholarship at the Wilberforce Institute in Ohio. From there he went to Chicago university, then to a medical college in Nashville, Tennessee, where he qualified as a doctor in 1937.

His next stop was, inevitably, Scotland. To practise medicine in Britain he needed yet more qualifications, which he gained in Edinburgh. On Sundays he attended the Canongate kirk, where they were so enchanted with the small, soberly dressed black doctor that he was soon elevated to be an elder.

During the second world war Banda went into general practice, first in Northumberland, then in Liverpool and finally in Paddington, West London.

African politics were looming ever larger in his life. In 1946, he had helped to write a rather cautious work called Our African Way Of Life, and by the early 1950s he was in the thick of anti-colonial agitation in London.

Banda campaigned ceaselessly, but in vain, against the creation of the Central African Federation. He foresaw that the white settlers of Southern Rhodesia would call the political tune. When the federation was formed in 1953, he left Britain in disgust to take up medical work in the Gold Coast, soon to be Ghana.

In 1958, young politicians in Nyasaland began a militant campaign for independence from white rule, and called on Banda to return to be their "messiah". So, after 40 years, he returned to the land he could scarcely remember.

The young nationalists brought tumultuous crowds to welcome him. In the excitement, violence broke out, Banda and his aides were arrested, and the federation's prime minister, Sir Roy Welensky, called on Britain to back firm action in the protectorate.

Banda spent more than a year in prison, but the Foreign Secretary, Iain Macleod, eventually decided that Harold Macmillan's famous "wind of change" was a hurricane too strong to be resisted.

Banda and his "boys", as he liked to call them, were freed, and Welensky's federation was condemned. Malawi became independent in July 1964. Within weeks Banda was locked in a power struggle with his cabinet. A main cause of the divisions was his hitherto unsuspected conservatism — his wish for Malawi to forge friendships with South Africa and Portugal, which still occupied neighbouring Mozambique. All but three of the cabinet were dismissed on the spurious grounds that they were secretly taking funds from Communist China.

The whites in Malawi — settlers and civil servants alike — were all behind the little doctor in a dark three-piece suit and homburg hat. And, by 1967, his opponents had been killed or driven into exile.

By 1971, when Banda became life president, his grip was absolute. He declared opponents were to be made "meat for the crocodiles" and he let it be known that he was to be called "Ngwazi" — the Conqueror. He promised that detainees would be kept in detention "until they rotted".

In fact, it has been estimated that from 1970 to 1990 a total of 250,000 Malawians — out of a total population of 8 million — had been in detention at one time or another. The bodies of many disappeared into the Shire river after interrogation. Several ministers who had angered Banda were killed in "car crashes".

Finally, pressure from both inside and outside the country led to a referendum in 1993, when Malawi voted handsomely for multi-party democracy. When Banda was defeated in the country's first democratic elections, he faced a murder trial, charged with the 1983 killings of three cabinet ministers and an MP. After an eight-month trial, Banda, who had been ruled too frail to appear in court, was acquitted.

For many years, Banda had had his supporters outside Malawi. The most vocal were rightwing economists who argued that the country was tightly run, making the best of what few resources it had. The crops were always planted on time, and the civil service was more efficient than in most African states.

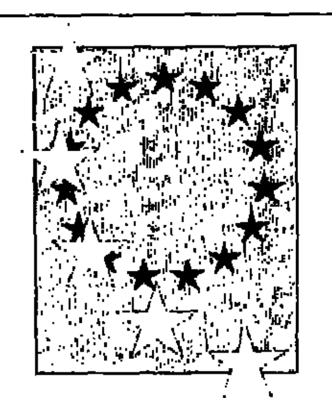
Yet such support had meant turning a blind eye to police state repression, the denial of press freedom and Banda's shameless accumulation of private wealth.

The achievements of Banda in the first two-thirds of his life were extraordinary. But the cruelty and excesses of the final third have put him, in the crowded pantheon of African tyrants, not so very far behind Idi Amin.

Richard Hall

Hastings Kamuzu Banda, born May 14, 1906 (official date); died November 25, 1997

EU counts cost of eastern promise



Europe this week

Martin Walker

WHATEVER its critics may say, the most remarkable feature of the European Union is the urgency with which others seek to join it. The EU rivals the Nato alliance as the seat of membership of the Western club, and is also seen as a virtual guarantee of future prosperity. By a curious coincidence, which dates back to President Charles de Gaulle's expulsion of Nato HQ from Paris in 1966, the EU and the Alliance are now both based in Brussels.

This is very convenient for visiting statesmen such as the members of the new Polish government who arrived last week. They assumed that they would pass directly from the welcoming Nato handshakes in the Brussels suburb of Evere to the fraternal embrace of Europe at the Commission's Breydel building.

No such luck. Poland's new prime minister, Jerzy Buzek, was stunned on his first official Brussels visit to be given a blunt warning that Poland's negotiations to join the EU could be blocked indefinitely unless the country fulfilled earlier pledges to cut its steel tariffs and restructure the industry with the loss of thousands of jobs.

Buzek, his defence and foreign ministers and other aides were also taken aback to learn that Poland's milk exports to the EU, worth $40 million a year, faced a ban from this week after EU inspectors found half the Polish dairies they visited to have "major hygiene and operational problems".

The sudden lash of the EU whip was timed as the UK Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, was touring eastern Europe, promising Britain's "whole-hearted support" for the accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Estonia and Slovenia have also been given Commission approval to take part in the first round of accession talks, and Britain wants to make this a showpiece of its six-month turn as president of the European Council, which starts next month. The high point is to be a European conference that will include all those other countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria and even Turkey, which do not make the first group for membership.

An enlarged EU has been a long-term strategic goal of Britain, convinced since Margaret Thatcher's day that the way to prevent the EU "deepening" its institutions into a federal Europe is to "widen" it with new members who will then dilute the federalist core. Moreover, the British schemed, the entry of new and poorer countries would finally force the Common Agricultural Policy to be reformed under the threat of bankruptcy.

Two of the trickier consequences of enlargement are now becoming embarrassingly plain. The first is the Polish problem, which symbolises the difficulty that all new members will face in girding their economies and social systems for the bracing effect of EU membership. The Polish political élite, which has long argued that Europe was the way to western European prosperity, must now explain the short-term job losses to tens of thousands of Polish steel-workers.

Poland's steel industry is a major employer as well as one of Europe's



Robin Cook pays tribute to Polish victims of the Holocaust in Warsaw last week PHOTO: CZAREK SOKOLOWSKI

biggest single sources of pollution. Three years ago, Poland agreed with the EU an annual phased reduction of their steel tariffs, from 9 to 6 and, next year, 3 per cent. Unable to cut the tariff last year, Poland was given a year's waiver, on condition that they came up with a plausible restructuring plan.

But the EU has rejected Poland's draft plan as "not serious". The EU has offered to pay up to $13 million, estimated to be half the cost of the redundancies it believes are required. Poland rejected this offer because it could not afford the co-payment.

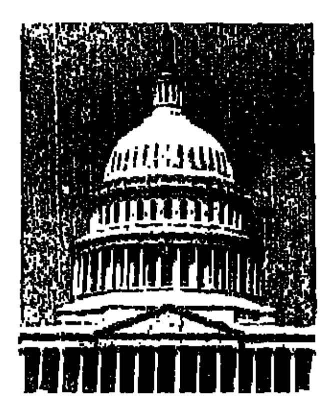
The second difficulty is that with the accession of Cyprus made problematic by the usual Greek-Turkish tensions, all the new members are from eastern and central Europe. The Club Med group of southern countries believes that such enlargement will change the geographical balance of power in the EU. "The expansion towards eastern Europe is an important step, but the region does not have the same critical mass of hundreds of millions of workers and consumers that a Euro-Mediterranean economic zone could have," Italy's prime minister, Romano Prodi, told Spain's Royal Political Science Academy in Madrid last week.

This has erected a new financial hurdle, with Spain insisting that it does not want to bear the extra costs of embracing central and eastern European countries. While Spain and Italy support the principle of enlargement, in practice the declaration of Spain's state secretary for Europe, Ramon de Miguel, that "we cannot expand at the cost of dissolving fundamental principles", is a serious obstacle.

Money lies at the heart of the argument. Germany insists that the planned enlargement is financed within the EU's current budget ceiling of 1.27 per cent of gross domestic product, and that it is no longer prepared to finance the lion's share of net payments to the EU budget. But the four countries whose per capita income is below 90 per cent of the EU average — Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland — currently receive almost $10 billion a year in extra "cohesion" funds. Spain, which gets more than half of this sum, is concerned that enlargement to the east would come at its expense.

All this follows a sobering series of findings in the latest EU barometer, an annual Europe-wide opinion poll published late last month. It records for the first time that public support for a single European currency has dropped below 50 per cent across the 15 member states, and that — also for the first time — only a minority (47 per cent) think they will get future benefits from EU membership. The most striking example was Ireland, where the proportion of those expecting future benefit from EU membership plunged by 25 per cent in the last year. It would be surprising if Poland did not begin to show similar signs of disenchantment.

Mean streets become an urban myth



Washington diary

Martin Kettle

HERE is a view of America with which most of us are likely to be familiar. A schoolboy goes into his school and shoots his former girlfriend and another pupil and starts spraying bullets around the school before he is disarmed. A driver in the inside lane sees a car starting to pull out from a garage and hoots, whereupon the driver of the second car stops, gets out of his vehicle and shoots the first driver dead. A black immigrant is arrested and taken to police cells, where officers take a toilet plunger and ram it up his rectum.

Pick up a newspaper any day of the week in the United States and the likelihood is that somewhere inside it there will be a crime story that sends shivers down your spine. These crimes, often taken up and insistently reported on the television news, have repeatedly generated high TV ratings. The lesson has not been lost on US film-makers, who long ago realised that there is a huge market for stories depicting ordinary people who are suddenly the victims of random and macabre acts of terror.

To complete the vicious circle, the films have sometimes acquired cult status, feeding the self-esteem of America's criminal underclass and even providing models for individuals, who then commit the apparently random acts which in turn feed the news stories, which generate the movies — and so on, round and round again.

Now here is another view of America. Fewer people in the US were victims of any sort of crime last year than in any year since records began. Violent crime fell by 10 per cent overall.

In particular categories, the fall was even more spectacular. Bag snatches were 21 per cent down. Motor vehicle thefts dropped by 20 per cent. Sexual assaults were down by 18 per cent and the most serious of all sexual crimes — rape — decreased by a remarkable 43 per cent. The chances of being the victim of a violent crime in the US are today slightly lower than they are in England and Wales.

Most people are rather less familiar with this second picture of American life than with the first. And yet the figures just quoted are only the latest in a succession of remarkably consistent reports on US crime published during the 1990s, which all tell more or less the same story — that America is becoming a much less dangerous place than it used to be.

In fact, every society has crazy people who suddenly start shooting for no apparent reason. Every society has people who over-react to apparently minor provocations with a homicidal force that defies belief. Every society has police officers or other public officials who commit horrific acts of unacceptable violence against prisoners.

Yet it is only in America — or mainly in America — that such acts are regarded as characteristic by the citizens of that country and where they also come to define the way in which large numbers of people across the planet see that country. That this should be the case in a country where the crime rate appears to be dropping so steadily and so encouragingly makes these attitudes doubly perverse.

It ought to go without saying that one should be careful with crime figures. An overall rate or an average, even in a small city, can mask huge differences between neighbourhoods. Some parts of the US continue to have high crime rates while others have fallen. In Philadelphia, for example, reported crimes of violence continue to rise, bucking the well-established trend elsewhere.

And the fact — for it is a fact — that crime is falling both in absolute and relative terms does not mean that crime is necessarily acceptably low or that people in the US have lost or are losing their fear of crime. An instant opinion poll taken by Rupert Murdoch's Fox TV channel after the recent crime figures were published showed that 80 per cent of Americans say they are more afraid of crime than they were 10 years ago, compared with a mere 9 per cent who say they are less afraid.

Nevertheless, the consistency of the figures — for the moment — and the actual experience of people that it is now safer to travel on, for example, the New York subway than it used to be, are powerful assets. In New York, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's recent re-election was based on both realities — the decline in crime and people's greater sense of personal safety.

Yet is this reflected in the way that people behave generally? Not very much. New York is untypical and, in any case, parts of it are still dangerous by any standards. Moreover, the media continue to behave as though crime is rising, not falling.

Maybe newspapers should think twice before they glorify the latest US crime story. They should remember that the press may be helping to create its own self-fulfilling prophecy, and could be making a problem worse when, for the moment, it is actually getting better.

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Human rights bill may put press on defensive

THE BILL now going through Parliament to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into British law is generally viewed as "a good thing" and a long-overdue reform, but the Government suddenly realised this week that it could, by mistake, be used as a privacy law with which to thwart investigative journalism.

In spite of public pressure, both this Government and its predecessor decided against introducing a privacy law on the grounds that the rich and famous might use it to prevent legitimate investigative reporting. The task of curbing journalistic excesses is left, instead, to a self-regulating body, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), which has promised tougher action against offenders in the wake of public concern about intrusion into the life of Diana, Princess of Wales.

The Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine, had assured ministers that the operations of the PCC would be exempt from the provisions of the Human Rights Bill, and that complainants dissatisfied with its judgments would not be able to use the new legislation to seek redress through the courts. He swept aside reservations by the Culture Secretary, Chris Smith, asserting grandly that Mr Smith was a mere layman while he was an experienced lawyer.

But Lord Irvine, once head of the chambers in which the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and his wife trained as barristers, has had second thoughts. He has told Lord Wakeham, chairman of the PCC, that the courts might, after all, have the power to intervene in the commission's work. Though Lord Irvine implied that this might be no bad thing, the Government is to hold emergency talks with a view to amending its bill to exclude press investigations.

IN A REFERENDUM in September, Wales voted, albeit narrowly, in favour of an elected assembly, due to come into being in May 1999. But the citizens of Cardiff, the principality's capital, registered a "No" vote, and the city compounded its sin last week by refusing to lease its City Hall for the assembly's use.

The Welsh Secretary, Ron Davies, offered £3.5 million to lease the hall, part of a grandiose municipal complex bequeathed to the city by the Marquess of Bute. The city demanded £14.5 million, so Mr Davies is now looking elsewhere. Swansea is the front runner.

THE élite universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which are older than Parliament itself, have many old boys and girls in high places who engaged in a frenzy of lobbying against government threats to "modernise" them by "redistributing resources".

Unlike most universities, the privileged two are federations of largely self-governing colleges, where students are given individual tuition and dine together in hall. They receive more government money per student than other universities, and the austere, Edinburgh-educated Chancellor, Gordon Brown, has it in mind to withdraw the extra finance, worth an annual £1,700 per student, they are given to cover the extra costs of their college system.

Mr Brown has complained that Oxbridge still takes half of its students from private schools. The two universities argue that they should be compared with other world-class institutions such as Harvard, or France's *grandes écoles*, all of which charge much more (to the state or to students) than they do.

The Government is to announce its decision by Christmas.

IN ANOTHER gesture towards greater openness, MPs are likely to win the right to scrutinise the way in which the £28 million a year paid to the Queen by the Treasury is spent on staff and maintenance of the five occupied royal palaces. Earlier this year, a report revealed that there was no formal record of the number of grace-and-favour apartments in the palaces, nor of the income the Queen received in rent from them.

Meanwhile the former prime minister, John Major, who was last month appointed guardian to the Princes William and Harry, moved quickly to establish that they should benefit from the commercial use of the name and image of their mother, Diana, Princess of Wales. He is to ask the High Court for powers to ensure that they share any money raised from sales of memorabilia bearing their mother's name or picture, even though the prime object of the sales may be to raise money for the Diana Memorial Fund.

BACKERS of a £500 million public lottery called Pronto, launched last week, immediately embarked on a campaign against government plans to ban it, or at least to get the ban delayed for two years so that they can recover their investment.

Pronto, launched in 2,000 pubs and clubs, is based on an American game, Keno, and offers a prize of £25,000. Punters can join a game every 10 minutes, or whenever 1,000 people across the country want to play.

The Home Office argues that gaming and alcohol are a bad mix, particularly for adolescents. Interlotto, which runs Pronto, is threatening to take its campaign to the European Court if necessary.





A shire horse and an Ardennes from the Working Horse Trust clear timber from Foxholes Brow, East Sussex. They are being used to avoid the damage caused by heavy machinery PHOTO. ROGER BAMBER

Beckett wins low pay battle

Seumas Milne

THE END of poverty pay was promised by the Government last week as it published its national minimum wage bill, which revealed that the Minister without Portfolio, Peter Mandelson, has lost his battle for sweeping exemption powers.

The historic measure to introduce a legal floor under wages will boost the pay of millions of workers, including homeworkers, agency and domestic staff, while employers who refuse to cough up will face a new criminal offence and a fine of up to £5,000.

Cabinet papers leaked to the Guardian last month showed that the Trade Secretary, Margaret Beckett, clashed with Mr Mandelson over his proposal that the bill should give ministers the flexibility to introduce wide-ranging exemptions from a minimum wage, including on the basis of region, sector or size of firm.

But the final bill explicitly rules out the possibility of such exemptions, and last week Mrs Beckett stressed the need for the new minimum to be as simple and universal as possible. Emphasising that a minimum wage was as much about sound economics as fairness and social justice, she declared: "It will be a single rate that will apply to all regions, sectors and size of firm."

The bill does, however, allow for lower rates for trainees and young workers under 26, and excludes the genuinely self-employed, prisoners, charity workers and children below the school-leaving age from minimum wage protection.

The Low Pay Commission, which is due to recommend a rate for the minimum wage next spring, has been asked to consider lower rates for young workers in the teeth of opposition from the Trades Union Congress and the respected Low Pay Unit lobby group.

More than a third of those earning less than £4 an hour, for example, are aged between 16 and 24. The TUC is arguing for a rate of £4 plus, while the CBI wants nothing more than £3.20. Professor George Bain, commission chairman, has said that £3.75 would not be outrageous.

Private solution for NHS

David Brindle

LEADERS of Britain's 230 private hospitals have held unprecedented talks with the Department of Health about bailing out the national health service if it hits a winter crisis.

Although the private sector tried to persuade the former Conservative government to use its spare beds during winter crises, it never managed to table proposals.

The fact that a Labour administration, ostensibly cool towards private health care, should have entered discussions with the Independent Healthcare Association shows the depth of anxiety among ministers and senior officials about the coming winter.

The talks, authorised by the Health Minister, Baroness Jay, have centred on sending health service patients to private hospitals and nursing homes, in order to free NHS beds for emergency cases.

Little more than half the 11,000 beds in private hospitals are occupied at any one time. The IHA has offered its members' spare capacity as accommodation for patients recuperating after operations, or as facilities for routine surgery while health service hospitals concentrate on emergencies.

David Lucas, IHA executive director responsible for acute hospitals, said last week: "We have been discussing with the people responsible for dealing with the winter pressures how the independent hospitals and nursing homes might provide extra capacity when they need it."

The Government has promised that no hospital casualty department will close to patients this winter, however severe the problems caused by influxes of emergency cases arising from bad weather or a flu epidemic.

A team of experts has warned the health department that this winter will be "at least as great an increased challenge" as last, when hospitals were under "very severe strain".

Ministers have raised the stakes against themselves, however, by promising action to curb spiralling waiting lists for routine surgery. The Health Secretary, Frank Dobson, has said that by the end of the winter, no patient in England will have been waiting more than 18 months for hospital admission in breach of the Patient's Charter.

Latest figures show that at the end of September, 818 people had been waiting for more than 18 months and 57,700 for more than a year.

Islanders face 'serious risk'

THE people of Montserrat have been neglected by the British authorities, live in wretched conditions and face the danger of fatal lung diseases, a report by a group of MPs who visited the volcanic Caribbean island claimed last week. *Tim Radford reports.*

More than 7,000 people have left the dependent territory, often to face official neglect and confusion in Britain. The 4,000 who remain are breathing toxic volcanic ash. In the long term they face diseases such as silicosis.

"There is still serious risk to people remaining in the north of Montserrat," says the report of the Commons international development committee. "The volcano could explode again and there could also be continued, heavier ash falls. Danger is exacerbated by inadequate health care and the population's ignorance of evacuation plans. We urge that risks be made clear to all who remain on Montserrat."

The committee had sharp words for both the present and previous British governments, the Foreign Office, the Department for International Development, the island's own government, and the British-appointed governor.

Its findings were welcomed by the International Development Secretary, Clare Short.

Blair opens door to electoral reform

Michael White

TONY BLAIR on Monday delighted supporters of electoral reform and alarmed defenders of Britain's traditional first-past-the-post system when he appointed a five-strong commission to investigate voting alternatives — of which four members are known to favour constitutional reform.

Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, retiring leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, will be joined by four "great and good" figures who are reform-minded, but pragmatic. The Lib Dem leader, Paddy Ashdown, who has long campaigned for proportional representation (PR), called it "a truly historic moment in British democratic history."

None of the five can be described as among those fanatical supporters of PR who believe that Mr Blair's offer of a referendum is their great opportunity to change the electoral system in favour of centre-left coalition politics. In addition to Lord Jenkins, who will chair the commission's work over the next year, other members will be the Conservative peer, Lord Alexander of Weedon; Labour peer Lady Gould of Potternewton; Sir John Chilcot, the retiring Permanent Secretary at the Northern Ireland Office; and the political journalist, David Lipsey.

Of the five only Sir John has not voiced support for the kind of constitutional shake-up which Mr Blair is masterminding. But they have a long way to go to find an alternative to first-past-the-post which is acceptable to the Government and can then be sold to a sceptical public in the referendum. Only then would the law be changed.

The commission's terms of reference were mapped out by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, in a written parliamentary answer. It will be "free to consider and recommend any appropriate system or combination of systems in recommending an alternative to the present system". It will also "observe the requirement for broad proportionality, the need for stable government, an extension of voter choice and the maintenance of a link between honourable members and geographical constituencies".

Senior Lib Dems, jubilant that Mr Blair had honoured his pre-election pledge despite remaining "unpersuaded" by the case for change, insist that "broad proportionality" now has ascendancy over traditionalists' claims to uphold "stable government" and the tie between MP and constituency. They argue that it points towards their own favoured single transferable vote option or the additional member system to be used for devolution and for Europe, and against the strictly non-proportional alternative vote, which Mr Blair has signalled he could live with. In reality, some form of compromise is likely.

● Mr Straw last week reversed a decision to have electors vote for parties rather than individuals in the 1999 European parliamentary elections. The move follows widespread criticism that the Home Secretary was allowing parties rather than the electorate to choose who will be their MEP.

Rich minister denies using tax dodge

Anne Perkins

SENIOR ministers closed ranks round Geoffrey Robinson, the Paymaster General, last week after he denied that he was using a £12 million offshore family trust to avoid paying tax in Britain. Mr Robinson said he had followed Whitehall and Treasury officials' guidance in the handling all of his financial interests.

Alistair Darling, Treasury Chief Secretary, said: "He has done what every other cabinet minister and other government minister has done in this government and in the past, that where they have shares and so on, they put them into a blind trust."

But Peter Lilley, the shadow chancellor, attacked what he called "breathtaking Labour hypocrisy".

Before the election, and since, Gordon Brown has emphasised his determination to minimise tax loopholes exploited by the accountants of the very rich. Mr Lilley quoted Mr Brown saying: "A Labour chancellor will not permit tax reliefs to millionaires in offshore tax havens."

It emerged last week that Mr Robinson, a close ally of Mr Brown, and well known as Labour's richest MP, was the discretionary beneficiary of the Orion Trust, which is registered in Guernsey. It is understood that Mr Robinson has received no benefit from the trust since he became a minister shortly after the May 1 election victory. In a statement Mr Robinson said: "There was no, nor could there have been any, UK tax avoidance. Moreover at no time have I transferred capital or other assets into the Orion Trust for tax or any other purpose."

On May 7, after being appointed a minister, Mr Robinson set up a blind trust in accordance with Cabinet Office rules to hold all his beneficial interests, including £18 million worth of shares in his company, TransTec. But the blind trust does not include the £12.5 million worth of TransTec shares held by the Orion Trust, which were bought from Mr Robinson in a complex but legal transaction last summer.

Conservative MPs called for a statement clarifying rules for ministers. And some Labour MPs expressed unease that a minister could even appear to be avoiding tax.

Detective Inspector Ray Mallon on the streets of Middlesbrough PHOTO. CARL RUTHERFORD

Crime chief faces inquiry

Duncan Campbell

ONE of Britain's best-known police officers, who is seen as a major influence on the Home Secretary because of his "zero tolerance" policing policy, was suspended from duty on Monday. The suspension arises out of an inquiry into what were described as "serious criminal and disciplinary allegations".

Cleveland police said Detective Superintendent Ray Mallon, head of Middlesbrough CID, was being suspended on full pay over allegations relating to an ongoing police corruption inquiry.

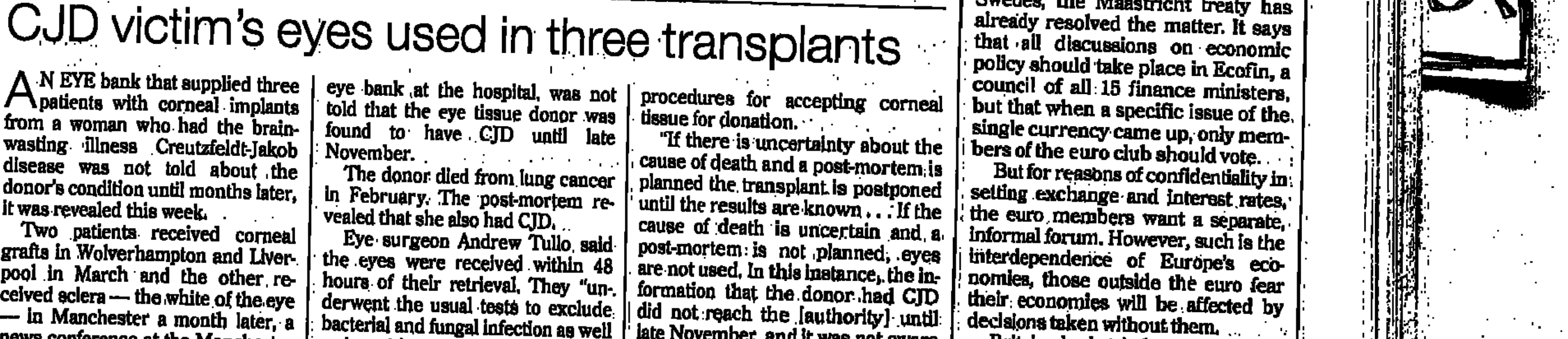
Assistant Chief Constable Robert Turnbull said Mr Mallon was alleged to have passed on information relating to the inquiry to a third party, thought to be the media, and to have engaged in "alleged activities which could be construed as criminal conduct".

Mr Mallon strenuously denied any wrongdoing and said he was "cool, calm and collected" about the inquiry. He was sure he would be vindicated by it.

It is understood that the events behind the suspension go back to October 1 when men charged with burglary offences had no evidence offered against them by the Crown Prosecution Service. It was then alleged that they had been offered heroin by two Middlesbrough officers in exchange for information.

Two officers were suspended and an inquiry launched. It has been suggested the inquiry could lead to as many as 500 cases being re-examined. One aspect of the inquiry into Mr Mallon will be to ascertain whether he divulged any details of this investigation to the media. It will also examine whether he was aware of the deal allegedly offered by the officers.

Mr Mallon is one of the most high-profile police officers in Britain. His fame is mainly due to him being the major UK proponent of "zero tolerance" policing, which means tackling every crime or offence as it appears, no matter how minor. The idea is to send a message to all offenders and make life more difficult for the major criminals who operate behind minor ones. Impressive drops in crime figures have been claimed in areas where Mr Mallon has introduced his methods.



CJD victim's eyes used in three transplants

AN EYE bank that supplied three patients with corneal implants from a woman who had the brain-wasting illness Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease was not told about the donor's condition until months later, it was revealed this week.

Two patients received corneal grafts in Wolverhampton and Liverpool in March and the other received sclera — the white of the eye — in Manchester a month later, a news conference at the Manchester Royal eye hospital was told.

But the UK Transplant Support Service Authority, which runs the eye bank at the hospital, was not told that the eye tissue donor was found to have CJD until late November.

The donor died from lung cancer in February. The post-mortem revealed that she also had CJD.

Eye surgeon Andrew Tullo said the eyes were received within 48 hours of their retrieval. They "underwent the usual tests to exclude bacterial and fungal infection as well as hepatitis B/C and HIV, and were subsequently issued for transplant.

He said that the hospital had followed all the transplant authority's procedures for accepting corneal tissue for donation.

"If there is uncertainty about the cause of death and a post-mortem is planned the transplant is postponed until the results are known . . . If the cause of death is uncertain and a post-mortem is not planned, eyes are not used. In this instance, the information that the donor had CJD did not reach the [authority] until late November, and it was not aware that a post-mortem was pending."

He said it would be "extremely difficult to speculate" on the chances of the three patients contracting CJD.

Brown fails to win place in euro club

Martin Walker in Brussels

THE Government's hopes of a prolonged honeymoon in Europe were dashed this week as the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, fought a losing battle against exclusion from the new single currency policy-setting group.

"The euro is a monetary marriage, and in a marriage you do not allow others into the bedroom," said the French finance minister, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, after a 12-hour meeting of European Union finance ministers broke up on Monday. "Those who share the same money will have more intimate relations than the others."

An exhausted Mr Brown departed from Brussels, leaving only an ephemeral voice on a tape recorder which claimed: "I am standing up for Britain's interests — this is a battle I am winning."

No other finance minister agreed with Mr Brown's interpretation.

Jean-Claude Juncker, Luxembourg's current president of the European Council, said that "despite heroic efforts" the finance ministers had been unable to agree on the composition of the new so-called euro-x group, an informal committee of the members of the euro club.

"The fact is that the 'ins' [single currency members] intend to meet, and that will be that. My preference is to come to an agreement at the Luxembourg summit on December 12, but if that is not possible, nobody can stop the members of the euro club from meeting."

Mr Brown had argued that there should be "no question of condoning an exclusive group", but failed to persuade the 11 nations expected to join the first wave of the single currency. Britain's hopes of a future say in the euro now rest with Tony Blair, who will attend next week's Luxembourg summit.

Britain has been pushed into a corner, in part by the intransigence of fellow "outsiders" Denmark and Sweden, and in part by the logic of the Franco-German position.

"You can't be both in and out of the euro," as Germany's finance minister, Theo Waigel, protested.

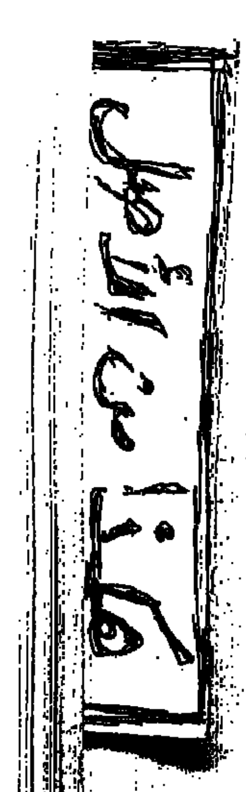
Mr Strauss-Kahn had sought to reach a compromise under which Britain could become an observer at meetings of those in the euro club, in return for a firm pledge that Britain would join the single currency soon.

Each side has its case. For the euro members, Mr Strauss-Kahn insists: "You cannot expect to manage a currency that is not your own."

For the British, Danes and Swedes, the Maastricht treaty has already resolved the matter. It says that all discussions on economic policy should take place in Ecofin, a council of all 15 finance ministers, but that when a specific issue of the single currency came up, only members of the euro club should vote.

But for reasons of confidentiality in setting exchange and interest rates, the euro members want a separate, informal forum. However, such is the interdependence of Europe's economies, those outside the euro fear their economies will be affected by decisions taken without them.

Britain had tried to solve this dilemma by promising to join the euro eventually, and assuming the "Blair effect" would win them concessions.



In Brief

THE parliamentary privileges committee is to launch an inquiry into the need for a new bribery and corruption law in the wake of the cash for questions scandal involving the disgraced former ministers Neil Hamilton and Tim Smith.

THE Church of England's general synod voted overwhelmingly to move towards possible amalgamation with the Methodists in the face of declining numbers of Methodists and falling attendances at Anglican churches.

THE Royal Air Force is facing a critical shortage of senior pilots next year as many of its most experienced fliers prepare to take lucrative jobs with commercial airlines before new regulations make it more difficult for military pilots to put flying hours in military jets towards the total needed for a commercial licence.

TEACHERS called for a government inquiry into the chronic underperformance of boys in almost all subjects and at all stages of compulsory education after the school standards minister, Estelle Morris, published a survey showing that two-thirds of girls — but only one half of boys — reached the expected level in history, geography, design and technology, modern languages and music.

GAY prisoners were given electric-shock treatment in the 1950s in a government attempt to discover the causes of homosexuality, according to documents released under Whitehall's "open government" policy. Other prisoners were administered the female hormone oestrogen if they agreed to treatment for what the Home Office described as "sexual abnormalities".

A NEW computer test for cervical cancer could remove the possibility of human error in checking smear tests, the Cancer Research Campaign said.

ULSTER Unionists said Ireland's foreign minister, David Andrews, should be sacked for interfering in the UK's internal affairs after he asked the German government to drop its attempts to have Roisin McAliskey extradited from Britain on IRA bombing charges.

WELSH farmers, frustrated by a decline in their income as a result of plummeting prices at cattle markets, staged protests against imports of Irish beef, forcing some lorries to turn back and dumping one lorry's 40-tonne cargo of beefburgers into Holyhead harbour.

LUCILLE McLAUCHLAN, the British nurse facing a seven-year jail term and 500 lashes in Saudi Arabia for her part in the murder of Australian nurse Yvonne Gilford, married her fiancé Grant Ferrie in a courthouse in Dhahran.



Scenting trouble . . . Fell hounds from the Blencathra hunt peer out from their trailer in Thirlmere, in the Lake District PHOTO: DAN CHUNG

Hollow win for hunt opponents

Anne Perkins

THE Government last week braced itself for another confrontation with its backbenchers over the campaign to ban hunting after ministers reaffirmed their refusal to rescue a Private Member's Bill by Labour MP Michael Foster despite a 3 to 1 House of Commons majority in its favour.

After nearly five hours of often passionate debate during its second reading, MPs voted by 411 to 151 in favour of Mr Foster's Wild Mammal (Hunting With Dogs) Bill, which would outlaw the pursuit of stags, foxes, hares and mink.

But despite the majority, the bill's supporters in Westminster — and rival camps demonstrating outside — all know that it is bound to fail because Tory opponents will be able to block it unless Labour's business managers give it government time.

Cabinet sources suggested that, if the pressure grew, ministers might give a backbencher the necessary nod and wink to table a "Foster amendment" to a future Criminal Justice Bill — but not the Crime and Disorder Bill now passing through Parliament. This would mean at least a two-year wait before the matter was settled.

The debate was marked by a succession of heavyweight Tory interventions — led by Michael Heseltine — warning against the bill on practical and legal grounds, and making a libertarian defence of minority rights. Mr Heseltine claimed the bill would lead to a ban on shooting and fishing. "It is the start of an agenda," he said, which would damage rural communities and cost jobs. Even Alan Clark, an animal rights activist, opposed the bill as badly drafted and a distraction from the wider issues of animal welfare.

But it was the Tory former minister Ann Widdecombe who emerged the heroine of the anti-hunting campaign. "Why don't those who actually are in favour of this bill take a trip to Kenya, stand in a lion reserve, unprotected, and see if they enjoy the hunt? I might enjoy watching it," she said.

After the vote Mr Foster, MP for Worcester, said: "This historic vote, the largest ever vote in support of a Private Member's Bill, makes it inconceivable that hunting will survive this Parliament."

He told his fellow backbenchers this was an opportunity to fulfil every MP's ambition to make a difference.

Ann Taylor, Leader of the Commons, refused to promise government time, however, and said it was up to the bill's opponents to respect the majority vote. She told reporters: "It really was a staggering vote and those who oppose this bill and obstruct it will have a lot of explaining to do to the country at large."

Half the Cabinet turned out to support the bill. The Chief Whip, Nick Brown, who is understood to favour the option of amending a future Criminal Justice bill to ban hunting, also voted for it.

Downing Street is understood to remain unpersuaded of the case for giving government backing to a matter of conscience. Nor does the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, regard it as a priority, let alone worth risking other government business by having a head-on clash with the Tory-dominated hereditary peers. Ministers believe that no amount of government time would stop its opponents exploiting procedural loopholes to block it.

Straw goes to war on juvenile crime

Duncan Campbell

PLANS for curfews to keep under-10s off the streets, orders to make parents control their children and wider powers to lock up under-13 offenders were announced last week by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, in "the most radical reform of the youth justice system since the second world war".

The white paper was broadly welcomed by police organisations, but some children's groups and penal reform organisations said some of the proposals were unworkable and unfair.

The paper proposes curfew schemes to keep unsupervised under-10s off the streets after 9pm; a parenting order requiring parents to take responsibility for their children or face penalties; a speedier justice system for persistent young offenders; reparation orders to make young offenders face responsibility for their crimes; wider powers to detain 12- to 14-year-olds; the abolition of the rule of *doli incapax*, that presumes a child under 14 does not know the difference between right and wrong; and the formation of a youth justice board to co-ordinate the implication of punishment throughout England and Wales.

Mr Straw said an estimated 7 million crimes were committed each year by juveniles. It was time for a root-and-branch reform of the justice system.

"Today's young offenders can too easily become tomorrow's hardened criminals," he said. "An excuse culture has developed within the youth justice system. It excuses itself for its inefficiency and too often excuses young offenders who come before it, allowing them to go on wasting their own and wrecking other people's lives."

Charles Clark, spokesman for the Association of Chief Police Officers, said: "ACPO welcomes the proposals and the comprehensive approach towards tackling youth offending . . . there are, however, a number of untested practicalities and potential resource implications."

The children's charity Barnardos, though welcoming the speeding up of the system, warned that "demonising parents and children" would do little to reduce youth crime.

Army faces bribery charges

Stuart Millar and David Fairhall

THE ARMY was last week struggling to contain its embarrassment after an inquiry was launched into allegations of bribery by foreign cadets at Sandhurst military academy.

Amid persistent accusations that the practice of wealthy overseas officer cadets offering gifts to their instructors was endemic at Sandhurst, Ministry of Defence officials insisted that this was an isolated incident.

Officers from the Army Special Investigations Branch are investigating seven senior instructors, who were arrested after allegedly accepting gifts, including expensive watches and foreign holidays, from overseas officer cadets attempting to influence their final grades.

The allegations came to light only after one of the cadets — a member of an Arab royal family — complained that he still received low grades despite his generosity to the instructors.

The seven instructors, all non-commissioned officers, were placed in temporary custody. Three remain suspended from duty. The rest have been returned to their duties while the investigation is carried out.

Army sources insisted there was no previous evidence of similar incidents at Sandhurst or other training establishments attended by foreign cadets. But one of the instructors concerned accused the army of making them scapegoats for a practice that had been allowed to continue unchecked for some time.

The repercussions of the Sandhurst scandal will focus attention on the the training of overseas cadets, around 4,000 of whom are accepted for military training in the UK each year. The practice is seen as an important way of winning potentially powerful allies and acquiring diplomatic influence.

Almost all the cadets come from the ruling élites of their own countries.

Up to 5,000 pit jobs at risk

Patrick Wintour

THE CABINET is working out how to save the remnants of the coal industry as managers of RJB mining, Britain's biggest coal producer, met this week to draft plans to close or sell collieries.

As many as 5,000 jobs are at immediate risk. The company has warned that UK coal demand may fall as low as 10 million tonnes in three years as electricity generating companies switch from coal to gas.

Stuart Oliver, RJB's spokesman said: "The evidence of this past week does support the claim of a serious threat to something like 5,000 jobs and five to eight collieries." The company now supplied 27 million tonnes of coal, but had contracts totalling only about 16 million tonnes in the pipeline, he said.

In a sign of ministerial impatience with RJB, the Energy Minister, John Battle, said that, despite the company clinching contracts with generators in recent days, it had not cut its original estimate of job losses.

Regions Minister Richard Caborn and Mr Battle have been asked to prepare a strategy to save the industry. Mr Caborn was the Commons industry select committee chairman who prepared a salvation package during the last round of pit closures three years ago. He supports stockpiling coal and investing in "clean coal" technology.

Arthur Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers, was due to meet Mr Battle this week.

The new global Aids epidemic

WORLD AIDS Day dawned this week on two different epidemics. Epidemic one, in the developed world, sees an Aids plague that has not spread as fast or as fiercely as first predicted. There are fewer people dying, fewer people catching Aids, fewer reported HIV infections. These reductions should be celebrated. Preventive health campaigns as well as the new anti-retroviral drug combinations are working. Even people with HIV are living longer. But epidemic two, in the developing world, is spreading on an almost unimaginable global scale. Last week's report from the joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids and the World Health Organisation (WHO) set out the grim facts: there are 30 million people worldwide with HIV or Aids, and an estimated 2.3 million people will die from the virus this year — marking an increase of 50 per cent on last year's figures. In a little more than a decade, all the gains that health workers have achieved through clean water projects, better sanitation and wider immunisation programmes are being wiped out. African countries that have added 20 years to life expectancy since independence have suffered a brutal reversal of this progress. Poor countries have become even poorer, while the better-off are better off.

The number of people in the United States dying from Aids dropped last year for the first time since records began in 1981. Aids cases in western Europe are expected to drop by 30 per cent this year. Fundamentalists who opposed Britain's liberal approach — safe sex campaigns and free needle exchanges for drug users — should look at how many more people died elsewhere. The US, where needle exchanges were banned, has had far higher mortality rates. Neither France nor Spain achieved the same high-profile safe sex campaigns: proportionately, France has had three times as many Aids cases and Spain seven times as many. One major problem facing health workers in the West is supporting the increased number of people surviving HIV. Other warnings need to be heeded: the new combined drug therapy is not easy. Some 30 per cent find themselves unable to survive the rigour of the regime. The fall in the number of infections is unlikely to be as dramatic next year. The successful new drug combination could easily suffer a reverse as new resistances emerge.

But it is the Third World where despair sets in. Even if a vaccine is discovered, the developing world's problem will not be over. Traditional vaccines are no use in developing countries because they are unable to store them (lacking fridges in the villages), distribute them or even afford them. The new combination drugs cost $17,000 per patient per year. Many developing nations spend less than $10 per patient per year. Yet there are lessons to be learned. Even in the West, prevention has been more important than cure. Local health promotion campaigns have worked in countries such as Uganda. More investment in traditional health programmes — immunisation, clean water, better sanitation — will produce a population more resistant to the virus. New research programmes among Africans with natural immunity may achieve a breakthrough, although the gap between identifying a remedy and "bottling" it remains wide. The French are right to push for a worldwide fund to combat Aids. Ironically, the biggest threat to the Third World could be the retreat of Aids in the West and the complacency that it would almost certainly breed.

Asia's meltdown shakes Beijing

WHEN the Asian Miracle shone high in the heavens, China was its brightest star. Now there is anxious speculation about whether the Chinese economy can avoid plunging with it to the earth. The question is taken seriously in Beijing. Last month, a top-level conference met to send the message that the financial system will be bolstered up. This month, Beijing plans another conference to reverse the slide in planned foreign investment into joint ventures. President Jiang Zemin has ordered a special study of the Asian crisis. Are these signs of panic or of precaution?

Opinion is sharply divided, as so often in our attitudes towards China. The case for a calm view is put strongly. Beijing still manages to keep a tight macro-economic grip. Inflation has been brought down to almost zero, there is a healthy export balance and enviable foreign reserves. Though devaluation elsewhere may make Chinese production costs less competitive on the coast, they are still much cheaper inland. Most investment already in place is long-term and much of it infrastructural, while more is beginning to move into the central and western regions. China may actually attract some funds diverted by uncertainty from other Asian destinations. China is also insulated because the renminbi is not fully convertible — though the goal, paradoxically, is to make it so. The leadership is aware of the need for political as well as economic change, though it takes it slowly. There may be poverty, but China has no urban slums comparable with those elsewhere in the Third World.

The opposite view is put with equal force: "Will China be next?", asks an international news magazine, which not so long ago was predicting that the Chinese economy would overtake that of the US. Bad loans in the financial sector total 15 to 30 per cent of annual gross domestic product, depending on the estimate. Banks continue to hand out cheap money to state enterprises whose assets are being stripped through the back door. Ten million urban workers have been laid off on partial wages or none at all. The high rate of growth conceals corruption and waste — far too much has gone into real estate. The sharp drop in inflation reflects the piling up of huge unwanted inventories. Income polarisation in what was once a relatively equal society continues to grow. All of this combines with a political system that lags dangerously far behind.

These contrasting views are not so much in conflict as they may appear at first glance. China's fundamental strengths should not be underestimated — forecasts of collapse have been disproved many times. Put crudely, China is large enough to absorb a degree of social unrest and inequality that would be destabilising in a smaller country. The investment of the past 20 years into new infrastructure has created a motor for continued economic growth. But the flaws are there, deeply embedded in a society still full of contradictions. The crisis raging in the region won't easily go away and should focus minds powerfully in Beijing.

Choking on the Czech medicine

THE TRANSITION was supposed to be as smooth as the revolution had been velvet. But the Czech Republic is no exception to the post-communist rule: market economics is not a magic solution. Vaclav Klaus won Western applause for his tough approach, and was barely criticised when he set the separatist style by breaking with Slovakia. He has now stepped down after a scandal over party financing, rather than because of policy failures. But it is the wider loss of public confidence that has forced his hand. The overvalued Czech currency was savaged by speculators, who took advantage of lax controls that Mr Klaus, an admirer of Milton Friedman, was reluctant to regulate. His approach to privatisation was modelled on Margaret Thatcher: his famous voucher approach was equally unsuccessful in generating popular capitalism. Instead the shares were bought up by banks and investment funds, enlarging the country's inefficient — and increasingly corrupt — industrial-financial complex. Foreign commentators are now saying that his reforms should have been more ruthless. Many Czechs feel that the medicine, not the patient, should be blamed.

It may seem unfair to berate the Czech Republic for failing to achieve what now seems increasingly the mirage-like goal of a successful post-communist transformation. Yet a more critical approach earlier on might have been more helpful. The reputation of the other Vaclav — President Havel — has also been tarnished by an unedifying financial row over his share of a family property, and by an over-hasty second marriage. But Mr Havel still retains much of the huge moral authority he gained in opposition to the old regime. It is a sign of his strength — and the Czech Republic's continuing weakness — that in spite of his poor health he still seems irreplaceable.

Capitalism for some is a zero-risk game

Martin Woollacott

WHEN Wall Street brokers jumped from high floors in 1929, they did so because they had, in the familiar phrase, "lost everything". Now we have another financial crisis, admittedly not on the same scale, but still an anxiety-inducing and wealth-reducing phenomenon. Nobody is winging past the window this time. Suicides are notable by their absence among the creators of this mess. They seem to have lost nothing — not their positions, their bonuses, salaries, savings, or their liberty, for none has gone to jail.

The curious language in which the crisis is discussed is hydraulic. There has been "a failure to control short-term flows" of funds. "Tokyo", a headline in the International Herald Tribune says, "pumps cash into bank system". Another headline says, "Asian Storm soaks ratings firms". There is an awful lot of water sloshing about in the global bathtub. These kinds of metaphor insistently suggest that the problems are the result of the system, and not the consequence of bad or immoral decisions made by individual managers and financiers, or by the politicians who gained or kept power because of economic growth, however dubiously that was achieved.

It is a language that stops us from realising that we are talking about incompetents, fools and knaves, and sometimes about cheats and thieves. And it prevents us from realising just what idiocies the West has sanctioned. Take South Korean investment in Britain, for which local authorities have competed so fiercely, offering bribes in the form of cheap sites and tax holidays. What exactly is it that South Koreans have been bringing to Britain, and to many other countries? It is not technology, or at least not new technology. It is not organisation, at least not of Japanese quality. It is, instead, cheap capital.

And now we learn that this capital is largely illusory. Much of it did not exist. Certainly the Korean managers who led this unsound international expansion are culpable. Equally, the British policy makers who embraced the South Koreans are also culpable, since the fact that South Korean companies were over-borrowed was well known. Here you have an example of the combination of Asian deviousness and Western shortsightedness, which is the central issue raised by the financial troubles of the last few months.

The East Asian economies have been in world competition. Their firms have driven companies in other countries to the wall, and their investments have created subsidiaries of critical importance to the economies of whole regions around the globe. What is beginning to be learnt about the Japanese and South Korean economies suggests that this was done to some extent under false pretences. In part, East Asian firms may have been operating on the basis of loans that ought not to have been made, by institutions which did not actually have the money. With credit they ought not to have had, and with their known tradition of ignoring shareholders, no wonder market share could be pursued so ruthlessly.

We have a truly serious situation which, even if it does not lead to a crash, already means that ordinary people in many countries will have more difficult and more uncertain lives, and somehow there is nobody to blame, let alone to punish. Or even to identify, except here and there. Tsugio Yukihura, a former executive in the failed securities firm Yamaichi, tells an investigating committee of the Japanese parliament how for years the firm hid massive losses in specially created subsidiaries. He cried. He apologised. The Japanese prime minister expressed remorse but ducked responsibility. That belonged to the firm, Ryutaro Hashimoto said, but he "felt shame". At least the Japanese will mention the word, but if there is any shame in Malaysia, Thailand, or Indonesia, or among the bankers and the stock and currency managers and manipulators of the West, it is well hidden.

Instead we get London merchant bankers, men who may well earn $500,000 or more a year, explaining unctuously on television that in order to avert a crash, many billions will have to be poured into the Southeast Asian economies. Who knows who will be screaming for help next? Some say Russia and eastern Europe, some Brazil.

EXACTLY whose money is this? It is not merchant bankers' money. It is *our* money, global taxpayers' money, either directly handed over by our own governments or disbursed by the world financial institutions. The reports speak of economies being bailed out, but in truth those who are being bailed out are the business classes of these countries, and, indirectly, of the West. Their peoples will pay the price of lost savings, lost jobs and lost services, as the International Monetary Fund conditions bear down, but the shrewd operators will be way ahead of all that. For those in the right place, it seems, capitalism is all gain and no pain.

There cannot be many investment managers who were genuinely unaware of the unsound basis of many Asian stocks. They went in anyway, trusting to get out before the problems their own actions were exacerbating came to the fore. Culpability matters not only because individuals ought to pay some price for foolish or immoral decisions. It matters because the business classes of the world are well on the way to removing risk from their own personal affairs. Their companies may go down, whole economies may go into decline, but the decision makers are largely immune.

In Japan, a few tearful words into the microphone and then back to your retirement home. In South Korea, not even that. What this means is that the thousands of businessmen and financiers, in the East and the West, who made the decisions that created the present crisis, have damaged the rest of us but not themselves. They have already half succeeded in persuading everybody that what has happened is the financial equivalent of freak weather — nobody's fault and now we should all pitch in to set things right. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Police linked to Argentine bomb attack

Christine Legrand in Buenos Aires

MORE THAN three years after the bomb attack against the Argentine Israeli Mutual Association (Amia), which killed 86 people in Buenos Aires, a new element has sparked fresh interest in the case. The discovery that a former police superintendent, Juan José Ribelli, was paid $2.5 million would seem to confirm that local police were involved in the outrage.

Ribelli, aged 41, who has been in prison since 1996 along with three other police officers, is suspected of having played a key role in preparing the attack, and of having supplied the terrorists with the booby-trapped van that blew up the Amia building.

Ribelli was once a trusted associate of Buenos Aires province's former police chief, Pedro Klodczyk. When questioned on November 23 by a parliamentary commission of inquiry, Klodczyk had no hesitation in describing his former righthand man as a "delinquent". He admitted that Ribelli and other policemen under his orders may have been involved in the attack, but denied all personal responsibility.

So far, the only new evidence has been unearthed by the parliamentary commission, while the interior ministry's investigations into the attack have made little headway, despite help from Israel's Mossad and the CIA.

An earlier anti-Semitic attack, carried out against the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in March 1992, killed 29 people. The bombers were never caught.

In the Amia case, the implication of Buenos Aires province police — with 48,000 men, the largest force in the country — has tarnished the reputation of the governor, Eduardo Duhalde. After suffering a crushing defeat at the general election in October, Duhalde, who hopes to succeed President Carlos Menem in 1999, began a spectacular purge of the police.

More than 5,000 police personnel have been dismissed, including dozens of senior officers who are thought to have been involved not only in the Amia attack but in numerous cases of drug trafficking, illegal gambling, prostitution and murder, including that of the photographer-reporter José-Luis Cabezas in July. Ribelli is thought to have used his position to amass a fortune of $15 million.



Argentina's President Menem with his Brazilian counterpart, President Cardoso, last month. There has been no proof offered following Menem's claim of Iranian links to the bombing PHOTO: DARIO LOPEZ-MILLS

Responsibility for the Amia attack was claimed by the Islamic Jihad, a pro-Iranian organisation based in Lebanon. A few days after the blast, Menem said there was evidence of Iranian involvement. So far, however, no evidence to support that theory has been released.

Investigations have shown, however, that Ribelli was in the vicinity of Ciudad del Este, the Paraguayan city on the border between Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, a few days before the attack. The city is regarded as a sanctuary for smuggled goods — watches, television sets, drugs and weapons — as well as a haven for fundamentalist Islamist groups.

What Argentines would like to know is why terrorist attacks have hit their country twice. Is Menem's foreign policy too closely aligned with that of the United States? Is it because of the size of the Jewish community in Argentina, the largest in the Americas outside the US? Or is it because of possible links between Menem, who is of Syrian origin, and certain Arab countries?

The secretary of state for security, Adrian Pelacchi, has said that "an assessment of the so-called Iranian lead is currently under way", and that appropriate steps would be taken if necessary. These could include imposing sanctions on Iran.

The federal judge handling the case, Juan José Galeano, travelled to Los Angeles recently to question an Iranian who has taken refuge in the US. A week after the destruction of the Amia building, this "repentant spy" accused Iranian diplomats of involvement.

The parliamentary commission of inquiry is also due to question Emilio Morello, a member of parliament for the Movement for Dignity and Independence (Modin), a far-right party that lent its support to Duhalde in Buenos Aires province.

Ribelli, once a member of the *carapintadas* (the name given to those who took part in the 1991 military uprising against Menem's government), is suspected of having acted as a contact between the local and foreign groups that planned the attack.

Buenos Aires's Jewish community has complained of "police harassment" and "anti-Semitic threats" against the families of Amia victims, who have formed an Active Memory association.

"The local connection doesn't end with Ribelli — investigations should be pursued at a higher level," says Diana Malamud, a representative of the association. A few months ago another representative, Laura Ginsberg, charged Menem and Duhalde with "protecting the local connection". At that time, Israel's ambassador to Argentina, Yitzhak Aviran, accused Argentine investigators of "anti-Semitism".

(November 27)

Unrest simmers as Morocco economy stalls

Jean-Pierre Tuquoi in Rabat

WHATEVER the political colouring of the Moroccan government that emerges from the general election of November 14, it will need to adopt an audacious economic policy. It is not so much that Morocco has resisted change over the past few years, but rather that its economic reforms have been too timid or too interfered with by the state apparatus for the country to turn, as it could have, into a new economic "tiger".

As a result, against a background of simmering social unrest, the predominant feeling among the population is one of frustration and helplessness, which Islamic fundamentalists are doing their best to exploit.

To be sure, the social climate has not been disrupted by any major strike in the past few months. But there are plenty of reasons for the population to feel disgruntled. Since 1985, the rate of economic growth has steadily declined in real terms. From nearly 5 per cent 10 years ago, it is unlikely to top 1 per cent this year.

The inherent unpredictability of an economy that remains heavily dependent on farming, and therefore on climatic conditions, has taken its toll. "Sixteen out of the past 20 years have been years of drought," said an adviser to King Hassan II.

Demographic factors also play their part. Even though population growth has dipped below the 2 per cent mark since 1995, the effects of that decrease on the job market will be slow.

There is general agreement among economists that Morocco must invest heavily if it wishes to boost growth and improve living standards. The impetus will not come from the state, which is wrestling with a persistent public deficit (3.7 per cent in 1996, not including revenues from privatisation).

A fairer tax system — the farming, commerce and real estate sectors all enjoy special privileges — is not on the agenda, and any move to increase foreign debt would only make matters worse.

Foreign aid is not limitless. With a visit by the French prime minister, Lionel Jospin, to Rabat coming up this month, Paris has made a further gesture aimed at easing Morocco's foreign debt: some 1.4 billion francs ($240 million) owed by Rabat has been wiped off the slate.

But there will be no further handouts from France, or from Brussels, with which Rabat has signed a free trade agreement. Along with Egypt, Morocco is the Mediterranean country that receives the largest amount of European Union aid.

The government has chosen to privatise public services such as energy, water and the building of motorways and ports. As for health and education, which remain in state hands, it hopes "to do better with fewer resources".

It is not easy to boost investment in a country where barely 15 per cent of the adult population has a bank account. Hence the drive to attract foreign capital. But results seem to have fallen short of expectations. After peaking in 1993, investment flows steadily declined until 1996. "They really took off in 1997 and have topped $1 billion, as compared with $500 million last year," according to a royal palace spokesman.

However, foreign investors hold only 5-6 per cent of stock market capitalisation. A working party headed by Mohamed Sekhat, governor of the Bank of Morocco, has identified 19 stages that the potential investor has to go through. "Clearing each hurdle can take between five days and two years," Sekhat says.

(November 27)

Ex-Congo leader sues oil firm

Jacques Follorou

IT LOOKS as though the decision of a Paris court may end up affecting the future of Congo-Brazzaville. Pascal Lissouba, the Congolese president overthrown by General Denis Sassou-Nguesso in October, has just filed a complaint accusing the French oil company Elf-Aquitaine of complicity in the coup.

Through this unusual move, Lissouba hopes to prove that Elf's Africa director, Philippe Jaffré, along with a presidential adviser and a banker, were guilty of "acts of terrorism, aiding and abetting murder and assassination, and conspiracy". Lissouba holds Elf responsible for the death of between 5,000 and 15,000 people during fighting between his and Sassou-Nguesso's forces.

"The *putsch* was made possible by the invasion and the current occupation of Congolese territory by armed Angolan troops and by the support of the oil company Elf, which operates Congolese, Angolan and Gabonese oil fields," Lissouba says.

He claims that the presence of Elf representatives at Sassou-Nguesso's side before, during and after the coup, and the fact that they "attended the farce of the general being sworn in as president", prove that Elf intended to "renegotiate its interests in that region of the world as fast and as effectively as possible without having to face competition".

Lissouba wants the French court to look into Elf's financing system, which he knows well because he himself benefited from it before being ousted. "It should not be hard, by examining Elf's accounts, to find traces of the financial aid it gave the coup, since the preparation and execution of an operation on that scale must have cost $100-$200 million, directly or indirectly."

Lissouba's Paris lawyer, Olivier de la Robertie, has told Le Monde that the complaint is only the first stage of a process aimed at getting the legitimacy of the exiled President Lissouba recognised.

The French justice ministry is taking a close interest in the case. On November 25, the Paris investigating magistrate Eva Joly, who is in charge of a separate Elf corruption case that has been running for many months, saw a member of the cabinet of Lissouba's former prime minister, Bernard Kolelas, in order to hear what he had to say about the oil company's secret financing system.

Elf told Le Monde on November 26 that its stance on the Congolese conflict was restricted to "respecting the principle of neutrality". "What counts", it added, "is not the change of a country's leader, but the continuity of the state."

(November 27)

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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The prickly business of sharing power

COMMENT
Olivier Biffaud

HAS there been a sudden change in the power-sharing arrangement between France's prime minister, Lionel Jospin, and its president, Jacques Chirac? Or does their "cohabitation" still operate according to the guidelines that the two protagonists laid down at the start? The latest skirmish between Jospin and Chirac suggests that the first hypothesis is the right one.

The prime minister's office prefers the second, and quotes the old adage: "Gather thistles, expect prickles." François Hollande, the new first secretary of the Socialist party (PS), has been urging people not to "overdramatise" the clash between the two men.

When Jospin found himself once again under fire from Chirac, he decided on this occasion to respond in a robust yet witty manner. On November 21 Chirac had warned against "risky experiments" on the social front, an implicit reference to the 35-hour working week that Jospin has pledged to introduce by 2000. In his closing speech at the PS conference in Brest two days later, Jospin referred to the "risky experiment" carried out by Chirac in the spring, when he called a snap election which his party lost.



One can't be both president and leader of the opposition

Chirac, who was in French Guiana when Jospin counter-attacked, refused to add fuel to the flames. Sources close to the president said he was not interested in getting involved in "political squabbling back home".

The spat had started in Luxembourg, where Chirac and Jospin were attending a special European Union jobs summit that Jospin had helped to organise during the meeting of European leaders in Amsterdam in June. Just before leaving Paris for Luxembourg, Chirac gave Jospin a copy of what he was going to say at the meeting.

His text stressed that "without the broad-based agreement of society at large, the effectiveness of the fight against unemployment may be impaired by the instability of employment policy provisions and the mirage of risky experiments."

Chirac was clearly attacking the introduction of the 35-hour working week: he had already made it clear he had a low opinion of the youth employment scheme to create 350,000 government-backed jobs. When asked to be more specific, Chirac made a joke about "ulterior motives" that had been attributed to him and said: "The prime minister will agree with me that risky experiments should at all costs be avoided."

Questioned on television live from Luxembourg on November 21, Jospin responded with an apparently harmless quip: "Who could be better qualified to interpret the president's remarks than the president himself?" End of episode.

But the scrap was not over. Jospin changed his tone when giving his final speech as first secretary of the PS in Brest. There were several reasons for his shift of tack. The first was a principle already invoked by Jospin on the occasion of an earlier run-in with Chirac over cohabitation: that you do not comment on French policy when you are abroad. He was unhappy when the president, during a trip to Russia in September, criticised the way the French privatisation programme had slowed down.

When Chirac told television viewers on July 14 that he, as president, had "the final say" in government, Jospin read out the constitution to him at the following cabinet meeting. Since that skirmish, which established the rules of the game, Chirac has regularly issued "warnings", "recommendations" and "reservations" about government measures and plans. He has done so behind the closed doors of cabinet meetings, but always subsequently revealed the tenor of his remarks.

Most of the time, it has been the ministers concerned who have taken responsibility for answering his charges. But on this occasion, as happened with the Moscow incident, it was Jospin who decided to defend himself — and to counterattack.

Jospin felt that Chirac's sly little remark in Luxembourg broke the rule that France should speak with one voice, and decided that it should not happen again. Sources close to him point out that if the problem of cohabitation is dragged into summit meetings, France's credibility will suffer.

Jospin also wanted to impress on the president that he could not expect incessantly to criticise government decisions without attracting return fire. The prime minister chose to do so in front of his activists at the party conference. But he also no doubt saw himself as the leader of a ruling majority responding to an opposition leader who insists on firing barbs at him.

(November 25)

Burma's junta shuffles pack

Jean-Claude Pomonti in Bangkok

IN THE past two weeks the Burmese junta, chiefly motivated by a desire to hang on to power, has been busy doing some window-dressing. The latest example was its decision to allow the leading opposition figure, Aung San Suu Kyi, to celebrate Burma's national holiday, November 24, at her home in the company of foreign diplomats and around 300 of her supporters.

On November 15, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (Slorc), the official name of the military junta that has run the country since 1988, was replaced by a State Law and Development Council (SLDC).

A number of army officers approaching retirement age, some of whom are suspected of corruption, gave way to younger and supposedly more dynamic men. However, Generals Than Shwe, Maung Aye and Khin Nyunt, who have been leading members of the military regime for some years, kept their jobs.

The junta clearly felt the time had come to inject a new sense of purpose into Burmese political life. The economy's recovery in the early nineties has petered out. For reasons that have nothing to do with the financial crisis in the region, the Burmese kyat has depreciated by almost 50 per cent this year. Inflation is running at 40 per cent.

The campaign to promote Burma's "tourism year", which came to an end this month, was not a success. And around $6 billion of foreign investment committed since 1989 has notably failed to galvanise Burma's still shaky economy.

After spending more than nine years in power, the junta has failed to give the country a constitution. Every attempt to do so has run up against the problem of Burma's minorities, with whom the military has signed some precarious temporary ceasefires.

At the same time, the generals are still reluctant to engage in an open dialogue with Suu Kyi, whose National League for Democracy swept to a landslide victory at the 1990 general election. The resulting assembly has never been allowed to convene.

In the meantime, human rights violations by the army and the increasing production of opium have not made life any easier for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), which Burma joined in July.

The controversy over Burma's membership resulted in the postponement of a meeting due to be held in Bangkok on November 17 between Asean and the European Union. The problem could well crop up again over the second summit between Asean and the EU, scheduled to be held in London in April 1998.

It is true that Suu Kyi was authorised to celebrate the anniversary of the first student strike against the British colonial administration in 1920, which is now Burma's national holiday. But the president of the junta, General Than Shwe, issued a message on that occasion in which he attacked — while avoiding any mention of Suu Kyi's name — "those who lack patriotism and do not respect the dignity of their own nation", and accused "neo-colonialists" of trying to interfere in Burma's internal affairs.

But although the junta has tried to consolidate its position by reorganising itself, it has not yet opened up the lines of communication to the opposition, something that Western countries have urged it to do.

(November 26)

Pollution threatens World Cup venue

Michel Dalloni

THE decision in 1993 to opt for the Cornillon site in Saint-Denis on the outskirts of Paris as the location for the future Stade de France, venue of the 1998 World Cup, was preceded by much dithering on the part of the government. That meant there was no time to carry out satisfactory borings of the subsoil. As a result, it was only when preliminary work on the stadium — such as earth removal and the digging of foundations — got under way that it was revealed that the site, earlier occupied by a huge coal-fired gasworks, was more polluted than had been thought.

Further fears were aroused in mid-November when the Stade de France's turf turned yellow. Did this mean the pitch itself was under threat from major pollution of the water table? The official explanation was that the grass had been damaged when it was mown just after being sprinkled with a substratum of crushed volcanic rock and quartz sand.

Robin des Bois (Robin Hood), an environmental protection organisation often consulted by the government on projects involving the reclaiming of polluted land, says it cannot understand why the Stade de France's pitch is designed to be 11 metres below ground level, and just above a possibly polluted water table.

"In theory, when you don't know much about a site, the best thing is to dig as little as possible," says Jacky Bonnemains of Robin des Bois. The eminent architect, Jean Nouvel, says that his design for the stadium, which was turned down, got round the problem by siting it at ground level.

Robin des Bois's fear is that the water table could rise if there were heavy rainfall or flooding (the Seine river is a stone's throw from the site), or that there could be gas emissions during a heat wave.

The Cornillon gasworks, which was built in 1912, produced gas for lighting, then for heating, over a period of more than 60 years. Its coal-fired process caused serious pollution of the soil and water table. One solution was to reuse the waste and turn it into oils, fungicides, fertiliser and so on. The trouble was that this produced even worse pollutants.

When the then prime minister, Edouard Balladur, decided in October 1993 to locate the Stade de France at the Cornillon site, much to the annoyance of Melun-Senart, the town in the Seine-et-Marne *département* that had been chosen by Michel Rocard's previous government, the authorities already knew the site was polluted, but did not imagine the situation was as bad as it turned out to be.

"From 1994 on, people living on the site told us there was sometimes a smell of rotten eggs, which is typical of ammonia pollution," says Bonnemains. "Boring work carried out early in 1995 proved that ammonia was present. There was such a stench that a masking product that smelt of chewing gum had to be sprayed over the site. The hole was quickly filled in and the results of the boring hushed up."

As a result, no one now knows exactly what chemicals are present in the soil and in the water table. "The gasworks closed down 30 years ago," says Bonnemains. "People can't really remember much about how it functioned. But what we do know is that the dry distillation of one tonne of coal produces 50-70 kg of coal tar and almost 150 litres of liquid ammonia, not to mention derivatives like naphthas, phenol and benzol."

At one point there were fears that an explosive cocktail of chemicals was present in the soil. Hence the secrecy surrounding the borings. People working on the foundations have detected the presence of hydrocarbons, coal tar, ammonia and even, it is rumoured, cyanide.

It is also claimed that when a fire at a nearby Total factory was put out in 1968 an enormous quantity of solvents sank deep into the ground. In France, the polluter pays. Gaz de France, which operated the Cornillon gas station, footed the bill for a survey of the soil's condition and the recommended depollution processes.

Total says it has done the same, but refuses to accept responsibility for any pollution of the water table. The pollution problem has bumped up the cost of the Stade de France by some 200 million francs ($35 million). Robin des Bois and some senior civil servants feel that the extra expense could have been avoided by a more prudent approach.

(November 21)

Le Monde
Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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The Washington Post

APEC Summit Leaves Bailout to IMF

Paul Blustein in Vancouver

FOR ANYONE hoping that the Asia-Pacific leaders meeting here last week would do something to solve Asia's burgeoning financial crisis, the summiteers offered this much: a commitment to avoid making a bad situation worse.

It was an awkward position for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, a body dedicated to liberalizing trade among 18 Pacific Rim nations, including the United States, Canada, Japan and China. Thrust into the role of reacting to the financial upheaval afflicting some of Asia's fastest-growing economies, the national leaders responded with a collective promise that they weren't about to embark on a course that would spook the financial markets even more than they already are.

By giving their blessing to a strategy allowing the International Monetary Fund to call the shots on how to assist financially besieged countries, President Clinton and his fellow APEC leaders assured the markets that nations such as South Korea won't be bailed out unless they take tough and painful actions to restructure their economies.

And by agreeing to eliminate trade barriers quickly in several industries, including chemicals and environmental equipment, the leaders made it clear that they will stick to their goal of opening markets in the region, rather than react to the crisis by turning inward and protectionist.

Still, as helpful as such messages may be in dispelling the worst fears of international investors, the leaders were in no position to provide a comprehensive0 solution. And the meeting produced some letdowns as well.

Most prominent among these was Japan's coolness toward a U.S. plea for Tokyo to act as the region's economic "locomotive" and help pull the region's troubled economies out of danger.

Clinton urged Japan's prime minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, to spur growth in Japan's vast domestic market and thereby help ameliorate the crisis by creating more demand for the goods produced by Japan's faltering neighbors. But despite Japan's economic stagnation and deepening financial difficulties, the conservative finance ministry has long resisted calls for stimulative policies such as tax cuts. And Hashimoto asserted after the summit ended that Japan was not so smug as to assume it could play a locomotive role.

"We are certainly not arrogant enough to think that we can take the role of locomotive for Asia," Hashimoto said after the APEC meeting. His comments were seen as a humble admission that mighty Japan's troubles run so deep that it cannot lend much of a hand to its neighbors.

"It's an extraordinary statement," said John Neuffer, a political analyst with Mitsui Marine Research Inc. in Tokyo. "What a turnaround for the country. Japan is turning inward."

"This summit gave a clear signal that the region will stick to the course of market orientation, liberalization, and sensible economic policies," said C. Fred Bergsten, director of the Institute for International Economics and an architect of APEC's free-trade vision.

Perhaps the most compelling message delivered at the summit came from Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo, who told his fellow leaders how his country was emerging healthier and more financially stable two years after a disastrous slide in the peso pushed the country into one of its worst slumps in history.

Zedillo said that when a crisis erupts, "in the short term, the most important thing that can be done is to give reassurance to markets, to investors that the economy in question is going to be placed on a sound footing," according to Dan Tarullo, Clinton's assistant for international economic policy, who attended the session.

Zedillo's comments, according to Tarullo, dramatized the sentiment for endorsing IMF-style restructuring as the best remedy for countries that find investors losing confidence in their economies. The IMF typically requires borrowing governments to reduce wasteful subsidies, eliminate pork-barrel projects, close insolvent banks and adopt other politically unpopular belt-tightening measures.

Yet another important moment came when the one APEC leader who disagrees sharply with the consensus in favor of orthodox free-market economics, Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamed, exhorted his colleagues to consider imposing controls over currency speculation.

In a news conference after the APEC meeting, Mahathir maintained that he "didn't stand alone" in favoring such restrictions. But according to Tarullo, Mahathir's proposal drew several objections from other leaders about the impossibility and undesirability of limiting capital flow across national borders.

It is significant that Asia is now backing the IMF as the logical lead institution in coordinating international rescues.

Only a couple of weeks ago, officials from several Asian nations were abuzz with the idea of an "Asian fund," to be capitalized with $100 billion in funds furnished mostly by Japan, to finance bailouts. But the proposal came under fierce criticism from officials in the United States, who feared that such a fund would be used by financially strapped countries to obtain cash to tide themselves over rather than submit to the discipline of the IMF.

Presidents Suharto of Indonesia and Kim of South Korea, along with prime minister Hashimoto of Japan, hear calls for action to ease their crises at the APEC summit in Vancouver PHOTO: KIMIMASA MAYAMA

Congress Stymies Bid to Cut U.N. Dues

John M. Goshko in New York

CONGRESS' refusal to pay the almost $1 billion the United States owes the United Nations has dashed the Clinton administration's hopes of reducing the U.S. share of the U.N. budget next year and has forced administration officials to look instead to 1999 or 2000.

The administration's strategy for resolving the long-festering dispute over U.S. dues was derailed on October 13 when the Republican-controlled House capped a battle with the White House over abortion by refusing to include $826 million for U.N. arrears in a foreign operations bill. A new attempt to obtain the money cannot be made before next year, when Congress will consider a supplemental spending bill.

The congressional action ruined months of painstaking negotiations among the administration, congressional leaders and U.N. officials. Their efforts were aimed at pulling the United Nations back from the brink of bankruptcy while obtaining agreement from the 184 other member states to cut the U.S. share of the annual regular budget from 25 percent — the largest amount assessed on any country — to 22 percent.

"This will make it near impossible to convince the other U.N. members to cut our dues," U.S. Ambassador Bill Richardson said at the time. "The Congress has sent me into battle to lower our dues scales without even a slingshot."

That gloomy assessment was reaffirmed by Richard Sklar, Richardson's deputy for U.N. reform and management issues. In an interview, he said: "Before Congress upset the apple cart, we thought there was a better than even chance of getting this done within the next few months. Now the chances of doing this during 1998 are nil. But we're plowing ahead with an eye toward getting our dues lowered in 1999 or 2000."

Sklar said that the setback in October was further proof of how deeply Congress and the U.N. mistrust each other. He referred to ingrained suspicion on Capitol Hill of the world body's willingness to make far-reaching reforms and the member states' growing conviction that no matter how many concessions are made to the United States, it will continue to live up to its nickname here of "Uncle Deadbeat."

"The key now is to find a mechanism that will stop this Alphonse and Gaston act of each side insisting that the other go first," Sklar said. "We have to find a mechanism that will allow us, more or less simultaneously, to make an arrears payment and get the assessment knocked down."

Except for peacekeeping, which is paid for by separate assessments on the members, the United Nations' regular operating budget is set for $2.53 billion for 1998-99. The United Nations budgets for two-year periods.

The sizable U.S. arrears for both the regular budget and peacekeeping have been building rapidly during the 1990s because Congress has balked at paying. As of October 31, the United Nations calculated the U.S. debt at $1.37 billion, or 61 percent of the $2.3 billion total owed by delinquent members. Primarily because of a dispute about how much the United States should be charged for peacekeeping, Congress has insisted that the U.S. debt is less than $1 billion.

Now, in trying to find a way to repair at least part of the damage, Sklar said the administration is hoping to find a money figure that the U.N. members would accept, at least for the moment, as a down payment on the U.S. arrears and that Congress would be willing to appropriate.

Mobsters Indicted for Stock Fraud

Sharon Walsh in New York

LEADERS of two of the city's most notorious crime families and their associates, two corporate executives and a half dozen stockbrokers were indicted last week on criminal charges of manipulating stock prices for their own benefit.

The indictments describe alleged mobsters from the Genovese and Bonanno families using intimidation and threats against the family of one executive to keep him in line.

Nineteen people were charged with 29 counts of wrongdoing, including racketeering, extortion, securities fraud and bank fraud, but there were no charges of violent crime.

"The markets must be isolated from the influence of organized crime," said Mary Jo White, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York. "They must be stopped before they get a foothold on Wall Street."

She said that her office believes the attempts of organized crime to invade Wall Street are "relatively isolated, and do not threaten the overall stability of our markets." Nevertheless, she called the case "extremely troubling."

The mobsters inflated the price of the stock of HealthTech International Inc., a Mesa, Arizona, health and fitness firm that is traded on the Nasdaq Stock Market, and profited by selling the stock at the higher price, the indictment said.

Tens of thousands of shares were given to the mobsters by top HealthTech officials Gordon Hall and Joe Kirkham, who were indicted last week and arrested in Arizona, prosecutors said.

In return for the gift of the stock, the crime families used mob-controlled brokers, whom they bribed and threatened, at the Wall Street firm of Meyers Pollock Robins Inc., to sell the stock, the indictment said. Six brokers of Meyers Pollock also were indicted.

"The mob has never seen a market they didn't want to manipulate," said James K. Kallstrom, assistant director in charge of the FBI's New York office, noting that in the past that had included the garment industry, waste hauling and the produce markets.

There have been published reports that the U.S. attorney's office, the FBI and other regulators are investigating up to 18 cases of fraud involving stocks traded on the Nasdaq Stock Market.

Rosario Gangi, also known as "Rossi," a "capo," or supervisor, in the Genovese family, and Frank Lino, known as "Curly," a capo in the Bonanno family, controlled the scheme, according to the indictment. Both were released on $1 million bail secured by property after being arraigned last week.

Gangi and Lino could receive up to 40 years in prison if convicted of the racketeering charges. Others indicted in the fraud could get up to 20 years.

German Students Take To the Streets

William Drozdiak in Berlin

IN THE latest burst of frustration over Germany's failure to adapt to a fast-changing world, the nation's university students took to the streets last week in the biggest wave of strikes and demonstrations in nearly three decades to protest the deteriorating quality of their education.

Once regarded among the world's temples of higher learning, German universities have lapsed into mediocrity through a combination of sharp spending cuts, overcrowded classes, irrelevant research and lazy professors who enjoy lifetime tenure and guaranteed salaries.

The education crisis is often cited as the root cause of Germany's troubles as Europe's largest economy struggles to streamline its social welfare state, infuse new flexibility in ossified institutions and encourage greater personal initiative to cope with the competitive challenges raised by global markets and the communications revolution.

"Germany is making a profound mistake, because we are short-changing our own future with an academic system that is totally unadapted to the 21st century," said Hans Weiler, rector of Europa University in the eastern border city of Frankfurt an der Oder. "It is perhaps the worst manifestation that shows the damaging effects of thinking the state should take care of everything."

While the crisis deepens, the federal and state governments are bickering over who is responsible. During a debate in parliament last week, Chancellor Helmut Kohl disavowed any responsibility for the crisis and said the lack of university funding is the fault of Germany's 16 state governments, a majority of which are controlled by the opposition Social Democrats.

"Many of the students' complaints are justified and deserve our sympathy and support," Kohl said. "The states are responsible for education, not the federal government."

But the states say they are too strapped for cash to live up to their constitutional responsibility for education and insist that the federal government must come to the rescue.

Like other crises that are brewing over taxes and pensions, the gridlock has spawned growing disenchantment among many Germans with their political leadership. In contrast to the American model, German colleges and universities offer free tuition to all students. This has fueled enormous growth in the student population, which has nearly tripled in 20 years to almost 2 million. There are few restrictions on length of study, so many students linger at universities well past age 30.

As governments have tried to rein in education costs, the proliferating number of students has depressed academic standards and caused such severe disparities that in some places students outnumber professors by 600 to 1. Federal and state governments, which share the costs, say the only alternative is to start charging fees.

The specter of having to pay for their education turned tens of thousands of students into protesters in Frankfurt, Berlin and Bonn last week. Demonstrations on such a scale have not been seen here since the 1968 leftist revolt against what students denounced as decadent materialism in German society.

These days, with unemployment reaching nearly 12 percent of the work force, German students are interested in landing jobs and joining the ranks of society, not tearing it down.

Fabian Wagner, 21, an engineering student, balked at the idea that he or his parents should pay for his college education. "Education must be available to everybody, not only to the children of the wealthy."



Thousands of German university students protesting against severe overcrowding and underfunding rally in Bonn PHOTO: ARND WIEGMANN

But critics of German higher education say the existing system is unjust because it places an unfair burden on those who do not get admitted to universities, since their taxes help subsidize the studies of those who gain the privilege of entry.

German reformers say a European-level approach that creates a network of compatible universities across national borders may be the solution to Germany's crisis and the higher-education problems that France and other neighboring countries also are experiencing. "Since 1968, we have always been afraid of establishing elites," said Peter Glotz, a former Social Democratic politician who is the founding director of a new university in Erfurt. "The quality difference between Europe and America is that we now lack universities among the world's best.

"The only way to overcome that gap is to create something at a European level that would also help bring together our diverse political as well as academic cultures."

Young Bring Mines Plea to White House

Vanessa Williams

A GROUP of Washington area schoolchildren bundled up 20,000 postcards from children in Afghanistan, whose crayon drawings depicted the horrors of land mines, and delivered them to the White House last weekend hoping to persuade President Clinton to sign an international treaty this week banning the explosive devices.

"Sign the land mine treaty!" a group of about 80 youngsters from the Afghan Academy, a cultural education program in Annandale, Virginia, chanted as they marched to the White House and then to the nearby New Executive Office Building to drop off bags of the postcards.

The drawings on the postcards were done by schoolchildren from the Afghan capital of Kabul, said Gail Snetro, of the Save the Children, which also is a member of the U.S. Steering Committee to Ban Landmines.

She said the Afghanistan Campaign to Ban Landmines spent a year raising public awareness about the anti-land mine campaign and collecting the postcards, which were provided by the international campaign and pre-addressed to Clinton.

"Dear Mr. President," the cards read, "Please sign the Ottawa Treaty to ban landmines in December 1997. Afghan children are depending on it."

"It's really closing a very full circle," Snetro said of last Saturday's demonstration. "The children in Afghanistan addressed the cards to President Clinton, and it was our obligation to make sure they were delivered to President Clinton."

One postcard featured a girl, with green eyes and clad in a red dress, standing on one leg, leaning on a wooden cane. Another showed a man walking out of a house, accompanied by a small dog, and stepping on a land mine. It explodes in a burst of squiggly orange lines. Several showed pastoral scenes, a shady tree or a flower garden, seeded with land mines.

Clinton spent the holiday weekend at Camp David and did not see or hear the young demonstrators, who were described by organizers as "little ambassadors for peace."

Clinton has refused to sign the treaty, arguing that to do so could leave U.S. troops exposed during war. Opponents of land mines say the devices left behind after a conflict maim and kill 25,000 civilians each year. Afghanistan, along with Angola and Cambodia, is riddled with land mines left over from past wars.

Lindsey Rahim, 10, said that because Clinton has a child, she thought he would be more sensitive to the suffering of other children.

"These kids are just going outside and playing or doing chores for their mother, and they end up paralyzed or lose an arm or leg," Lindsey said.

Money Talks – and Names Names

OPINION
William Raspberry

"SAW YOUR column about how black folk pay too much attention to civil rights and not enough attention to business opportunities," the cabbie said.

I thanked him for the compliment, but he just went right on talking. "Also saw the piece in your paper about the Baltimore stadium," he said. "And plus I saw the article about the people in New Orleans Parish renaming all those schools."

"So you read the paper," I said. "Is there a point you wish to make?"

"I just made it," the cabbie said. "Or maybe you are one of those black people who can't see an enterpre . . . a business opportunity even when it smacks them across the chops. Don't feel bad, though. I didn't see it right away myself — not until I read about the folks in New Orleans renaming their schools to get rid of the names of slaveholders. Even the elementary school named for old George Washington has been renamed for Charles Drew."

"And just what has that to do with entrepreneurship?" I asked.

"Be patient. I'm coming to that. The New Orleans people just went and renamed the schools. That's civil rights. But look up the road at what Maryland did with the new stadium for the Baltimore Ravens football team. The state sold the team the naming rights for $10 million. That's business."

"Naming rights," I said. "Why is that worth $10 million?"

"Because, Mr. Nonentrepreneur, the Ravens can turn around and sell the rights for a lot more than that. Last year the Carolina Panthers sold the naming rights to their new stadium to LM Ericsson, the Swedish telecommunications people. You know how much? Three mill a year for nine years. And haven't you noticed how all the new sports arenas carry the names of big companies — the United Center in Chicago, Delta Center in Salt Lake City."

"But Washington's stadium has already been named — Robert F. Kennedy Stadium," I said. "And anyway, the Redskins have moved out of town to the suburbs . . ."

"Are you finally catching on, or did you just get lucky?" the cabbie said. "The name 'Redskins' is offensive to a lot of Native Americans. So what if the Washington NFL franchise got smart and sold the naming rights to some of the tribes that are making a bundle off casinos? Maybe they'd be back in the free-agent market."

It was an interesting idea, I told him, but for one small point: "Black folks don't own any big time sports franchises. Isiah (sic) Thomas couldn't even . . ."

"Get out of your little box!" the cabbie said. "Sports arenas and school buildings are just an example of what I'm talking about. Black folks run Washington, don't they?"

I admitted that the Financial Control Board is mostly black.

"And what does Washington have that other cities don't?"

"Marion Barry?" I ventured.

"Monuments, man! For starters, there's the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial — both named for slaveholders, by the way. Sell the naming rights and you can get your city out of debt and have enough left over to start a revolving fund to set some of your folks up in business, even without set-asides."

"Sell to whom?," I said. "Who'd want a monument?"

"Does the name Bill Gates ring a bell? You think he wouldn't like to have a world famous obelisk named for him? You think a certain media mogul who's married to Jane Fonda wouldn't be interested in a dome-topped Ted Turner Memorial among the cherry blossoms?"

"I see . . ."

"That's just the beginning," the cabbie said. "All the states have streets or avenues or circles or something with their name, but think of the cities and counties that would love to be commemorated in the Nation's Capital. Sell 'em naming rights. And you wouldn't have to offend anybody to do it, either. I mean, there're no descendants of Mr. 16th Street or Mr. East Capitol to raise a stink."

"I have to give it to you," I said. "That's a wonderful idea. In fact, if you'll drop me off at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library . . ."

"Didn't you hear?" the cabbie said. "That's the Rush Limbaugh Library. Used to be named for Martin, but the big time talk show dude outbid him."

Leaders March Into Soviet-Era Past

Daniel Williams in Minsk

PERHAPS nowhere in the former Soviet Union does the scent of the old U.S.S.R. seem stronger than in this poor and struggling East European country. President Alexander Lukashenko, is trying to command economic growth into existence by decreeing that everyone in Belarus work toward a 3 percent increase in industrial production.

Do you miss the cat-and-mouse games between political dissidents and KGB agents? Come to Minsk, the capital, where opposition activists meet secretly to pass around underground tracts and videotapes. Are you looking for government-run low-wage, low-production businesses? Dozens of factories here are dependent on subsidies and make goods almost no one wants.

Welcome to the time warp.

The image of democracy and free markets marching in lockstep is the political cliche of the post-Cold War 1990s. But some countries, including this one, are marching in a different direction.

Belarus is not the only former Soviet republic to practice strongman politics and retreat from liberal economics. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan all have turned back the clock to some extent. But all of Belarus's neighbors have moved toward liberalization. In economics, Poland, Russia, Lithuania and Ukraine dove into the free market cold bath, and, despite hard times, none has returned to one-man or one-party rule reminiscent of Soviet times.

But Human Rights Watch reported in August that Belarus has "reversed nearly all the advances in the field of human rights and rule of law" that marked the past decade. In particular, attacks on the press are widespread — from the beating of reporters to the use of tax inspectors to harass publishers, the human rights group said.

Belarus's other claim to fame is its loose union with Russia in a pact signed last spring. Although stopping short of a formal merger, the pact obliterated the border between the two countries. The agreement also sealed Belarus's inclination to look to Moscow for economic support and political leadership.

Liberals in Russia fret that because of the close relations, the Belarusan example might be contagious. But the problem is likely to be the other way around: How will a small, undemocratic country with a rigid, government-centered economy prosper when big brother is developing in an entirely different direction?

The Lukashenko government argues that it is Russia that is heading down the wrong path. "We see Russia's problems every day on television. We are not going to follow its example," Nikolay Korbut, the finance minister, said in an interview.

Such comments might seem like bluster elsewhere, but in Belarus they seem appropriate. The country harbors a deep reserve of nostalgia for Soviet days, or at least for the economic stability of that era.

Even people in private business say things were easier then. Poorer people, still dependent on government handouts or jobs, are even more emphatic. "Things were much better under Soviet rule. Money was stable, not like now, where money disappears and there are no jobs," said Liubov Kontash, a waitress.

In Minsk, the climate is as Soviet as the sky is gray. The government-run Belarus Hotel has security guards checking identification at the entrance, waiters who spend more time watching television than serving patrons and discos where handfuls of patrons dance a two-step to whatever music is playing.

Foreign investment is stymied by uncertainty over the direction of the economy and politics. Last year, foreign investment totaled $58 million, compared with more than $2 billion in neighboring Poland. The World Bank ranks Belarus 115th of 135 countries on the basis of business attraction.

"There will be no shock therapy here," said Edouard Eiden, a private consultant who helped devise the economic program. "Our people are not ready to have a small class of rich people and wait for this class to make others rich," he continued. "We don't, for instance, consider inflation a crime. We print money because it is ridiculous to make reforms at the expense of paying salaries."

This approach also applies to politics, he contended, although he seemed unhappy to pursue the subject. After mumbling something about the room possibly being bugged, he said, "Let's give the people something to eat and then we'll talk about democracy."

Korbut, the finance minister, echoed the sentiment. He argued that there was no opposition in Belarus, only "informal groups" — the phrase dates to Soviet times — who criticize Belarus abroad.

This is the platform of Lukashenko, 42, who won the 1994 presidential election with a pledge to clean up government. He gained notoriety by praising Hitler for building a "mighty Germany" and suggesting that he would exercise presidential power the same way.

Lukashenko justifies crackdowns on the press on the grounds that Belarus is surrounded by enemies. A year ago, he dissolved the parliament and arranged a referendum on a constitution giving him sweeping powers. Officially, 95 percent of Belarusans voted yes. Opponents cried fraud; and see Belarus sinking into a long-term dictatorship. They dispute only how strict the rule will be.

"For now, it is soft-core Stalinisim," said Yuri Hashevatsky, who made a satirical documentary about Lukashenko that has never been shown. "You feel the tension grow. People have their houses searched . . . Police beat demonstrators. Whether he will cross lines into bloodshed is another matter."

The West has limited leverage on Belarus. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund give no loans to the country and Belarus's role as a strategic problem ended when it agreed in 1992 to surrender its store of nuclear weapons.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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How Paranoid Ideas Help Shape History

Jonathan Yardley

CONSPIRACY
How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From
By Daniel Pipes
Free Press. 258 pp. $25

DANIEL PIPES, the authority on Middle Eastern affairs and editor of Middle East Quarterly, has written in this brief but dense volume a highly useful primer on conspiracy theories, or the "set of fears" that produced a "body of political ideas that I call conspiracism." Much of the ground he covers will be familiar to students of history and politics — the Crusades, the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", the Illuminati, the French Revolution, Leninism and Naziism, the American Red Scares — but the net effect of his inquiry is larger; he makes clear that to a startling extent conspiracy theories have "had a profound impact on European and world history."

"Like alchemy and astrology," Pipes writes, "conspiracism offers an intellectual inquiry that has many facts right but goes wrong by locating causal relationships where none exist; its is the 'secret vice of the rational mind'." As a result "this book is the opposite of a study in intellectual history", since it requires Pipes to "deal not with the cultural elite but its rearguard, not with the finest mental creations but its dregs". He warns that "so debased is the discourse ahead that even the Russian secret police and Hitler play important intellectual roles."

As a consequence there is a temptation to regard conspiracy theory as "a minor phenomenon, even a laughable distraction", but this is a mistake. Conspiracism has immense capacity for mischief; its "forces can move history — and have done so repeatedly". Pipes's summary of its chronology makes the point succinctly: "Conspiracy is a story in six acts. Suspicions about Jewish and secret society conspiracies emerged during the Crusades. The Enlightenment period saw petty conspiracy theories become a common tool of interpretation. The French Revolution raised the stakes, stimulating conspiracy theories about enemies who seek world hegemony. Through the 19th century, these ideas acquired greater scope and depth, finding their classic expression in Russia in the 1890s. The world wars saw such widespread acceptance of the paranoid style that conspiracy theorists seized power in several major countries and came close to global hegemony in 1940-41. In the next half-century, conspiracism declined in the West while gaining importance in other parts of the world. Summed up, conspiracy theories grew steadily in importance over a period of nearly two centuries, culminating around 1940, and then they retreated."

Pipes begins with the present, offering a look at conspiracy theory as it continues to thrive in the United States, albeit on a minor scale. It thrives among "the politically disaffected and the culturally suspicious", and tends to be concentrated in "the black community and the hard right". Among many blacks there are fears that the federal government "uses blacks as guinea pigs, imposes bad habits on them, targets their leaders and decimates their population"; thus the widespread belief that AIDS has been deliberately spread in order to kill off blacks, and that crack cocaine has been underwritten and distributed by the government to demoralize the black community.

At the other end of the political spectrum the hard right became convinced during the Cold War "that a conspiratorial body of Americans, known variously as the Money Power, the Insiders, the Secret Team or the High Cabal, were ready to sell out their country to the Soviet Union, which would then establish a one-world government". This is more difficult to maintain today, but its essential spirit lives, feeding on fears of an invasion of the United States by United Nations forces and on the many fears that inspire the militia movement. As Pipes quite correctly notes in an appendix, the Internet has proved to be an ideal medium for the promulgation and dissemination of these fears, with unknown consequences for the future.

It is important to make the distinction, as Pipes does, between "conspiracies, which are real, and conspiracy theories, which exist only in the imagination". Actual conspiracies occur all the time, in both public and private life; one of history's cruelest ironies is that the worst conspiracies the world has known were formed in order to combat imaginary conspiracies that Lenin, Stalin and Hitler so deeply feared.

The great age of conspiracy theory — "the core of the conspiracist experience" — took place between 1815 and 1945: "The secret society myth spawned a great number of actual secret societies, it grew into a conspiracy theory about Anglo-American imperialism, and anti-Jewish ideas evolved into conspiratorial anti-Semitism." Though it is commonly assumed that conspiracy theory is a pet obsession of the right — when Pipes uses "right" and "left", he means not "conservative" and "liberal" but the extreme positions on both ends of the spectrum — in fact the left is equally hospitable to it. Nazilsm was conspiracism on the right, its central fear being a Jewish conspiracy; Leninism was conspiracism on the left, its hobgoblin being capitalist imperialism. But both sides "engage in similar forms of conspiracism because they share much with each other — a temperament of hatred, a tendency toward violence, a suspiciousness that encourages conspiracism — and little with the political center".

Looking to the future of conspiracy theory, Pipes is relatively sanguine, finding a "return to common sense . . . in North America and Western Europe". He suggests, and there is reason to believe he is right, that "countries in transition to democracy (the young United States, the Weimar Republic, post-Soviet Russia)" are far more susceptible to fears of conspiracy than are nations where "the rule of law, freedom of speech and minority rights" are in place. Obviously the grievances in America's black community arise out of fears that certain minority rights are as yet unsecured, but overall the United States is a relatively tranquil society.

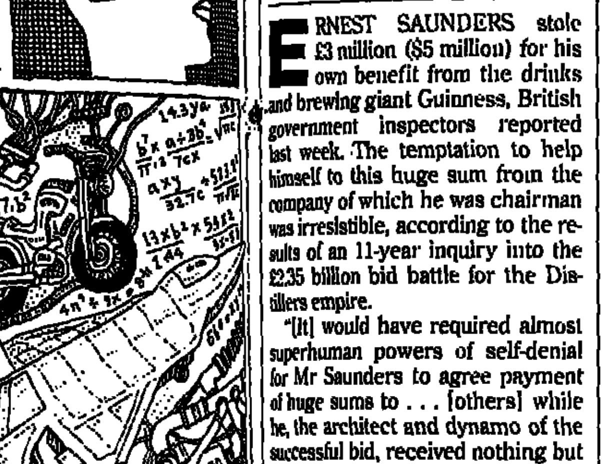


ILLUSTRATION: MARK ALAN STAMATY

Evolutionary Way of Thinking

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

HOW THE MIND WORKS
By Steven Pinker
Norton. 660 pp. $29.95

AT SOME time or another, most of us become puzzled, at least for a while, about the strange workings of the mind. How come we recognize our upside-down suitcase on the airport conveyor belt even though we have only seen it right side up before? Why do some objects look more beautiful than others? Why is it that sometimes we become so wrought up emotionally that we cannot think straight? (Or, for that matter, how come we can think straight at all, and what does that mean, anyway?) These and hundreds of similar conundrums are solved once and for all in this new book from Steven Pinker, the wunderkind from MIT, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who directs the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience there.

Not so long ago, during the glory days of behavioral psychology, the mind was imagined as a black box into which flowed stimuli from the environment, and out of which came instructions for behavior that were mechanically linked to the incoming stimuli. An alternative to this model was the older notion that the brain was packed with instincts and drives pulling the mind in various directions, again in a strictly mechanical fashion. Neither one of these perspectives explained how the nervous system came to operate this way. The psychologist was supposed to observe and record how people behaved. It was considered an unscientific waste of time to ask how the black box of the mind was built.

In the past two decades a much more exciting and liberating image of the mind has started to emerge. This new line of inquiry into the laws of thought is based on the application of evolutionary theory to the workings of the mind: what the pioneering psychologist Donald Campbell called "evolutionary epistemology". Its basic assumption is that the forces of natural selection have been shaping the way our ancestors perceived the world, stored sense impressions and connected them into strings of thought. Under this assumption, the strange and wonderful things our minds do fall into meaningful patterns. Biologists have known for some time that without evolutionary theory the study of life forms makes little sense; now it is becoming clear that one cannot really understand psychology either unless one looks at it through the lenses of that theory.

Of course, there is no direct way to study the effects of natural selection on thinking. The best one can do is resort to "reverse engineering," which consists of looking at current functions of the brain and trying to understand why and how

In the past two decades a much more exciting image of the mind has emerged

they developed over time. This might seem like a rather feeble way of building an argument, and when carelessly done, it is indeed unconvincing. But when the approach uses detailed evidence and sound logic, it reveals an impressive story about how a homogeneous blob of protoplasm barely able to sense light through some accidentally thinner layer of skin could evolve into a complex organism with a brain that can build computers and compose symphonies.

No one tells this story with greater authority and panache than Steven Pinker.

OK, I admit that his smarts and knowledge verge on the annoying. One senses a guilty wish for a law against someone knowing this much and passing judgments on intricate problems with such ease. Fortunately Pinker eschews the usual ponderous academic obfuscation, and his light sense of humor makes one almost forgive his intimidating erudition.

In the first part of the book, Pinker describes how natural selection might have engineered different computational faculties, starting with the simplest perceptual feats such as "seeing" where one object ends and another begins (actually as it turns out this feat is not simple at all, since it is very difficult to get a machine to do it). He describes how successful links between reflexes and memories begin to interact and form the basis for logical inference. From these simple, basic building blocks Pinker reveals how consciousness, values and a religious sense have developed. One might quarrel with some of the quick conclusions — I for one feel that his analysis of consciousness trivialized its self-reflective quality — but most of them are like shafts of light illuminating what is usually a dark domain.

Although this narrative tells how physical and biological processes can ultimately explain the origins of humankind's most cherished accomplishments, it never seems reductionist. Pinker is justly suspicious of currently fashionable talk about self-organizing matter, but he takes into account the qualitative differences that appear as matter achieves higher levels of organization when forced to do so by selective pressures. Thus he can acknowledge that his genes have programmed him first and foremost to propagate themselves. Yet as a conscious individual, he has chosen not to have children. "By Darwinian standards," he notes, "I am a horrible mistake, a pathetic loser . . . But I am happy to be that way, and if my genes don't like it, they can jump in the lake."

With these few words, the bane of evolutionary arguments, which is their strict causal determinism, is neatly dispelled. It is a welcome message, which allows the reader who has been informed that his mind is made up of blind demons obeying obsolete instructions carved into the genes by natural selection, to wonder whether to take a walk, go to a film, or go for a beer, and know that what his or her mind will decide cannot be predicted by the laws of physics or biology.

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Saunders 'stole £3m from Guinness'

Dan Atkinson

ERNEST SAUNDERS stole £3 million ($5 million) for his own benefit from the drinks and brewing giant Guinness, British government inspectors reported last week. The temptation to help himself to this huge sum from the company of which he was chairman was irresistible, according to the results of an 11-year inquiry into the £2.35 billion bid battle for the Distillers empire.

"[It] would have required almost superhuman powers of self-denial for Mr Saunders to agree payment of huge sums to . . . [others] while he, the architect and dynamo of the successful bid, received nothing but his regular salary."

They conclude: "To understand is not to excuse. It was not for Mr Saunders to vote himself a further bonus, let alone one of this remarkable magnitude."

This is the first time Mr Saunders has been declared to have stolen money for his own use during the bitter and controversial takeover fight in 1986. In 1990, he was jailed for his part in a share-rigging operation designed to pump up the value of Guinness shares during the bid, but the trial explicitly excluded any suggestion of personal enrichment.

Mr Saunders described the theft finding as a smear, adding that it was "completely and utterly untrue". The 62-year-old businessman said the report, compiled by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors, was "politically motivated".

Inspectors David Donaldson QC and Ian Watt, a chartered accountant, reinforce the 1990 court verdict, in which Mr Saunders was found guilty of organising an illegal operation to support Guinness's shares by using the company's own money to ensure victory in the fight with Argyll — now the supermarkets group Safeway — for control of Distillers, then the grandest name in the world of whisky and of spirits in general.

Again and again, they accuse him of having lied to them and accuse him also of having tampered with evidence. But they add that he was not alone in the City at that time in using sharp practice to get what he wanted: "It would be easy to regard Mr Saunders as a man corrupted by a milieu. Such an assessment would contain an element of truth.

"It was not Mr Saunders who conceived the techniques used in the support operation . . . on the other hand, it was Mr Saunders who decided what company he should keep . . . far from resisting the sirens, he adopted their song. The success of the bid corrupted him further, leading thereafter to unjustifiable favours for cronies and self, and a dubious attitude to truth."

At the heart of the Guinness bid was an operation to indemnify "friendly" holders of Guinness shares against any loss on their investments and to pay "success fees" to certain parties. Mr Saunders's £3 million formed part of a £5.2 million payment from Guinness supposedly to an American lawyer,

Saunders: theft claim 'untrue'

Thomas Ward, via a tortuous route. The payment was said to be for services rendered by Mr Ward during the bid. But £3 million of this ended in Mr Saunders's account at Swiss bank UBS. Mr Saunders said this was simply a parking space for money destined for Mr Ward.

The inspectors did not believe him. "The natural inference to be drawn . . . is in our assessment also the correct one: £3 million of the £5.2 million payment was intended for the benefit of Mr Saunders."

Noting Mr Saunders's energy, the inspectors said he "dominated the company virtually from the moment of his arrival in 1981".

Mr Saunders's five-year jail sentence was halved on appeal and he has returned to life as an international businessman, with interests in Britain and America and earnings reported at more than $850,000 a year.

Alex Brummer comments: Despite its vintage, the Guinness report is far from being an irrelevance. It paints a far different picture of the Guinness affair than it was generally possible to glean from the show trials of 1990-93.

These trials were largely concerned with apportioning the blame for the share conspiracy on Mr Saunders and a narrow group including Heron property tycoon Gerald Ronson, stockbroker Anthony Parnes and the investor (Sir) Jack Lyons. Subsequent prosecutions against advisers Roger Seelig, Lord Spens and eventually Thomas Ward (in 1993) were aborted and, in the latter case, failed.

As the inspectors have discovered, the web of deception behind the Guinness bid for Distillers went far wider than that. It reached into the heart of the City establishment with two of the most blue-blooded of City names, Cazenove — still often designated as the Queen's stockbroker — and Morgan Grenfell, involved in share transactions about which they should have asked more questions, demanded more disclosure and required greater documentation.

The theory put around by Lord Moyne (Jonathan Guinness), among others, that Mr Saunders, although a good marketing chap, was seduced into over-reaching himself and the company by a fast crowd of Jewish entrepreneurs is not at all borne out by the inspectors.

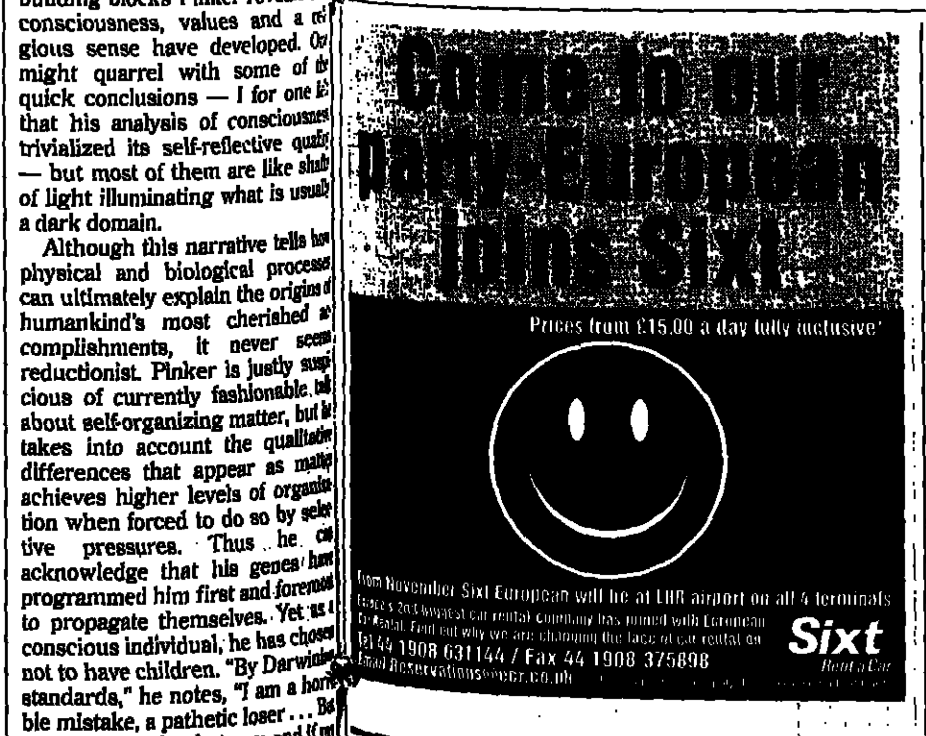
Instead, the inspectors have painstakingly reconstructed a trail of paper which points to a myriad of participants. A chance Sunday morning meeting between Lord (Jacob) Rothschild on a West End pavement the day before Guinness unsheathed his bid, led the financier (after the bid had been announced) to build up a substantial stake through Cazenove and Morgan Grenfell as part of what he described as "foreign affairs": keeping other City institutions happy.

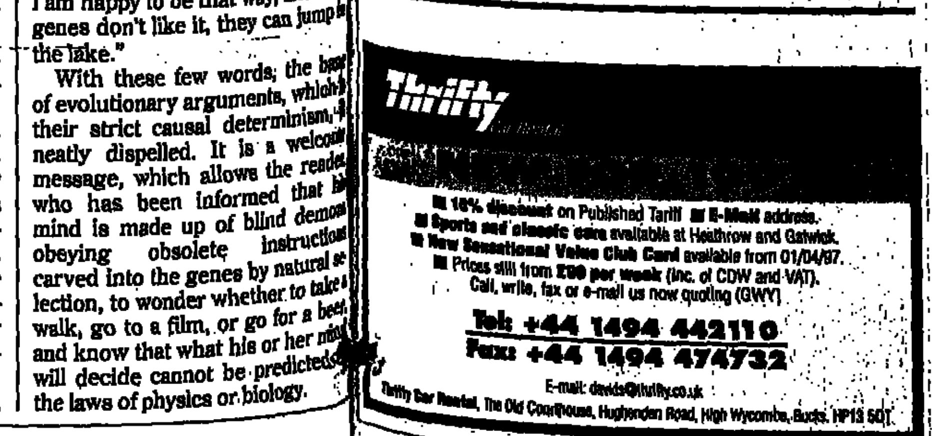
The inspectors broadly find that in the City of the late-1980s anything went; at a period when takeovers were at a peak the financial community's own policeman — the Takeover Panel — was a paper tiger.

As a morality play, the Guinness affair has much to commend it. Among the findings of the inspectors are a cynical disregard by the participants for laws and regulations, cavalier misuses of company funds and contempt for truth and honesty. To pretend all this ended with the trial of the Guinness four would be nonsense.

A disregard for the City rule book and morality was seen earlier this year when the young entrepreneur Andrew Regan launched his assault on the Co-operative movement with the assistance of merchant bankers Hambros.

The Government should decide whether the new Financial Services Authority ought to bring the Takeover Panel within its new activist, legislative framework. Leaving it outside is an anachronism.









You can't go wrong with the right MBA

John Crace analyses the recent boom in management courses

IT SOUNDS like an urban myth. You spend a long time struggling in your career, worrying whether you'll ever get promoted — or worse still, made redundant. You then go off and do an MBA and, hey presto, everyone loves you. You can almost name your job and salary.

If all this sounds a bit too good to be true, you're probably right. These days there are so many different institutions offering MBA courses that some employers are quite picky about which qualifications they recognise.

But, as a rule of thumb, it appears that you can't go far wrong with an MBA. You may not end up with the job of your dreams, but you will certainly acquire the skills to take on something worthwhile.

MBAs don't come cheap. At one end of the market, Britain's Open University charges about £1,700 per year for its three-year course; at the other end of the scale, the London Business School, regarded as the *crème de la crème*, charges about £25,000 for its two-year, part-time course.

But the price doesn't seem to be a deterrent. "The evidence is that an increasingly buoyant MBA market is following quality," says Julia Tyler, director of the full-time MBA programme at the LBS. "All our hard quality indicators have gone up this year, and we have had a record number of applications."



No kidding: Your future is brighter with an MBA

In 1985, British MBA programmes enrolled 2,000 students; in 1995, more than 10,000 people (a figure that does not include the distance learning students) started an MBA course. Analysts say there is no simple answer to explain this growth.

Most likely, though, is that people have begun to realise that an MBA can give a career a massive boost — especially at a time of growing globalisation; indeed, in some industries an MBA is even seen as essential for advancement.

Luci Rathan, publishing director of Loaded magazine in Britain, says: "My MBA hasn't always been vital for the jobs I've done, but it has definitely got me noticed. People are much more likely to interview you if you've got an MBA, because they reckon that you will have a good framework and philosophy for dealing with all sorts of tasks. As such you should be able to learn a great deal quicker on the job than most people." She took her MBA at Bradford. "I saved up and took out a loan to afford the fees and my living costs. But it was money well spent."

The ideal, of course, is to get your employer to pay for your MBA. This is not always as easy as it sounds; not only are many firms reluctant to make that form of investment in management training, but they are also concerned about training up an employee who may then depart elsewhere to a better paid job at the first opportunity.

The UK Department of the Environment funds a limited number of Grade 7 civil servants to take a two-and-a-half year programme at Imperial College, London.

Bryony Houlden, who runs the team in charge of the Government's Rough Sleepers Initiative, has nearly completed her MBA. "It was a tough selection process," she says. "First I had to be nominated by the DoE, then I had to be approved by Imperial. But I'm delighted I got through."

Increasingly, many programmes are being tailored to fit particular industries. This does not mean that the courses are radically different, though; most cover much the same ground. The difference often comes in the emphasis placed on the modules and the areas where the practical experience is applied.

One note of caution, though. As Terry Goh, who took his MBA at London's City University in 1986 points out, the hard work does not stop with getting a MBA. "People are impressed by it, and it helped me get my current job at Coopers & Lybrand, but the qualification counts for nothing once you start working. Then, it's all about how well your last project turned out."

So if you're looking for an easy life, then maybe the MBA qualification isn't for you.



The Department is a major focus for postgraduate study and research. A large graduate school with many students at Masters and Research level, the Department provides an exciting climate for study. Students bring many different perspectives and experience and many come from overseas. They mix regularly with students from Departmental Centres, as well as the University's Centres for Development Studies, European Studies and African Studies Unit.



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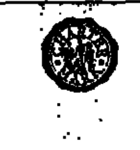
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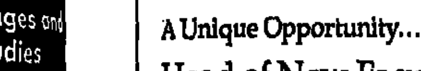
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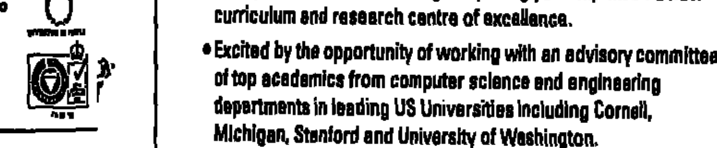


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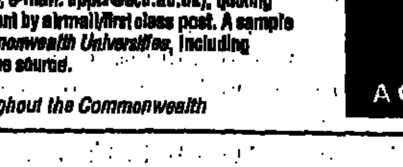
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Abbreviations: P - Professor; AP - Associate Professor; ASP - Assistant Professor; SL - Senior Lecturer; L - Lecturer; AL - Assistant Lecturer.

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Letter from Papua New Guinea Claudia Kennedy

Sibling revelry

ALL HELL breaks loose as my van turns off the main road and stops at Ngasuapum village market. "*Sista bilong yumi!*" — our sister! — a voice bellows, almost superfluously since most of the market women are already crowding around me. Some faces are familiar, others I struggle to place in the complex weave of family ties.

The owner of the voice is my "sister" Kila. Whether elder or younger, I have no way of knowing, as Kila is not too sure how many "Christmases" she can count to her name. Insistence on this detail is dismissed as an idiosyncrasy of my white woman's culture obsessed with youth.

I am also at a loss to define precisely how many sisters I have acquired: a confusion partly genealogical, partly linguistic. My Papua New Guinean family does not distinguish between sisters and maternal cousins. Second cousins, third cousins however many times removed — all are simply designated *sista*. The common custom of calling siblings of the opposite gender sista and those of the same sex *brata* (brother) spices up the merry melange of nomenclature that would make an anthropologist's hair curl. Confused? Such were my ponderings as I was hugged, patted and squeezed by *bratasusa bilong mi* — my brothers and sisters. Stick to that and I suppose I can't go wrong.

Kila sweeps in, pushes aside the last of our bratasusa and takes charge. Nobody defies Kila. She grins, teeth stained crimson by incessant betelnut consumption. Suddenly she claps her hand in front of her mouth, muffling apologies for chewing so much betelnut. The other women roll their eyes at her uncharacteristic show of modesty.

Kila's house is an incongruous mix of bush materials and components from the hardware store in town. We settle in the open living area outside, a platform raised like the house about a metre off the ground and shaded by a sago palm roof. Curry powder, crackers, peanut butter and tea bags are rowed neatly on a shelf to one side, cooking bananas hang from the rafters. Kila spreads out a tablecloth and piles up green coconuts, bananas and a packet of custard creams. "*Nau yumi stori*" — now we chat, Kila announces. She picks up a coconut, decapitates it in one blow and hands it to me to drink. Cracking open a betelnut with her teeth, she bites off a piece of lime-tipped pepper with a satisfying crunch and having thus seen to everybody's well-being, settles for a gossip. Village life is not always this easygoing, but the Melanesian ability to switch off time has its moments.

Kila's social conventions, dictating that the hostess must dismiss her guests, caused some confusion during her first visits to my house. She was forced through my lack of etiquette to announce her own departure. No mistake this time: "Now you go," Kila suddenly declares.

However, travel in PNG is rarely simple. My heart sinks as we approach a tip truck embedded axle-deep in the mud, wheels spinning. Its awkward angle to the track and the two-foot drainage ditches either side make it impossible to pass. Excitement! Kila leaps into action. Villagers materialise from nowhere. Their noisy exchanges in the village language indicate numerous and varied assessments of the situation.

Kila informs me that our brothers propose to push my van past the truck. She plunges back into the fray, clutching my precious car key. Engines roar and whine, wheels spin, shouting, haggling and shrieking: Kila revels in chaos. By contrast an old woman, infinitely patient, disappears into the bush to return with long slender tree trunks. These she deftly chops and places ladder-like under my front wheels.

Finally the van is coaxed past the truck. Cheers clapping, back-slapping, congratulations and the key is pressed triumphantly back into my hand. I thank my rescuers effusively, a little ashamed of my lack of faith. Echoes of noisy farewells accompany me home, leaving my bratasusa with gossip to last them for months.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

IS THERE a cure for morning sickness in early pregnancy?

EACH woman experiences sickness differently, and a remedy that works for one pregnancy will not be effective in a subsequent one. However, you may find some relief by drinking ginger tea and/or wearing a seasickness bracelet. A light snack can be helpful in averting an impending nausea attack. If all else fails, you could emigrate to New Guinea, where morning sickness is virtually unknown. There, boils are symptomatic of early pregnancy. — *Sue Brearley, London*

SICKNESS is a remedial effort on the part of the body, which constantly produces metabolic waste eliminated by the kidneys, etc. During pregnancy, the mother has the extra waste from the foetus and placenta to eliminate. In early pregnancy, the mother's body may need a temporary rest from the work of digestion in order to cope with this elimination. So she vomits. Do not try to cure your morning sickness. Stop all food, and drink only water for a few days, and the sickness will soon be over. This will not harm you or your baby. — *Alan Ashley, Bramford, Ipswich*

IS THERE any truth in the story that eucalyptus trees can spontaneously combust?

IT IS a myth, probably born from instances in bush fires where eucalyptus trees, sometimes hundreds of feet ahead of the fire, suddenly burst into flames because of the volatility of eucalyptus oil in the leaves. But this doesn't mean that koalas, with their eucalyptus-laden breath, can be turned into lethal weapons. — *Ray Leggott, London*

WHY are radiators invariably placed under windows? Surely the heat will escape?

A WINDOW will always be the coldest surface in a room because glass is such a poor insulator. The air next to a window will cool more quickly and become heavier than the room air, so "falling" towards the floor and spreading across the room at a low level. A radiator has the reverse effect, warming the adjacent air which, being lighter, will rise and spread at high level. If the radiator is placed on the wall opposite the window, the two effects will combine to create uncomfortable conditions. — *Chris Hutt, Bristol*

CLASSICAL literature has many allusions to lions. Were there lions in Europe and when did they become extinct?

OTHER animals, nowadays found mostly — if not only — in Africa, were also to be found in southern Europe: on the small island of Telos, off Rhodes, excavations unearthed an elephant cemetery. — *Paul Mavros, Thessaloniki, Greece*

THERE never were any lions in Europe while *Homo sapiens* was around. The reason for the stories about lions, and the symbolism attached to a non-European animal in European culture, lies in the fact that our culture does not have uniquely European origins. The "cradle of European civilisation", ie, Classical Greece, borrowed and adapted influences from Asia and Africa (where there are lions). — *Peter Davies, Erlangen, Germany*

HOMER'S lions never roar and perhaps he knew of them only from heraldry. The Greek for "lion", *leon*, is derived from the ancient Egyptian *rew*, which denotes a recumbent lion and so a lion statue, as opposed to a living lion, *mai*. — *R Drew Griffith Kingston, Canada*

Any answers?

I HAVE heard that urine is quite sterile. How can this be if urine serves to rid the body of toxins? — *Catherine Bennett, Hong Kong*

ARE natural selection and the "squashing of the unfittest" producing hedgehogs and toads who know the Green Cross Code? — *John Thesiger, Surbiton, Surrey*

I HAVE an air-recycle button in my car which stops air from outside entering the cabin. How long can I use it before suffocating? — *Robert Parker, Birmingham*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/





The National Asset Register includes three rifles for every soldier and 14 motorway service stations

Modern Domesday Book full of surprises

Larry Elliott and Richard Norton-Taylor

THE British Treasury last week published the first list of the state's assets since the Domesday Book more than nine centuries ago. Meticulously detailing buildings, works of art, parks, desk-top computers, prize-winning stallions at the National Stud and even lawnmowers, the 550-page National Asset Register was hailed by the Government as a breakthrough in the handling of the public finances. Whitehall departments have been given the all-clear to sell surplus land and property to raise money.

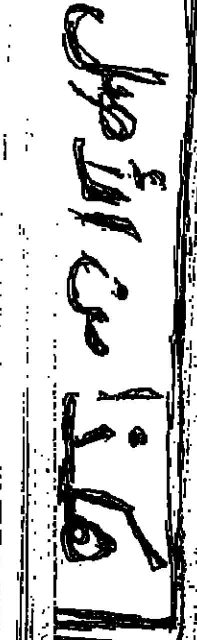
The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Alastair Darling, said that the register — dubbed Domesday Book II — was "an essential tool of good government. Any business would know what it owns and put each item to maximum use". Unlike William the Conqueror's attempt to put a value on his kingdom — estimated at just £73,000 in 1086 — the new register does not attempt to put a value on the state's stock of almost 200,000 assets. However, officials admit they are worth far in excess of the £125 billion book value in the national accounts.

Mr Darling dismissed suggestions that the announcement might lead to "an auction" of government assets. "This is not a sales catalogue and there are no price tags on individual items," he said. "This is an attempt to make it easier for departments to deal with its assets more efficiently. Departments are, for the first time, being given an incentive to use their assets in a sensible way."

Assets owned by the security and intelligence agencies are not listed "for reasons of national security". However, the Ministry of Defence is revealed to own 90,000 assets — nearly half the total number listed on the register.

The register has uncovered a vast array of state assets, ranging from embassies in Paris to the car park at Ipswich Town football club. Examples include:

- The Royal Navy has 98 establishments, almost two bases for every one of its 52 surface ships and submarines. The army has three rifles for every soldier;
- The MoD has 55,000 shares in the British Shipping Federation, reflecting its interest in requisitioning merchant ships in emergencies. It also owns 709 works of art, many of them from the former admiralty, 226 antiques and 517 horses;
- The Foreign Office has 1,437 properties overseas. It has 20 in Canberra, 27 in Ottawa, 49 in Paris, 21 in New York and 71 in Washington. Assets owned by the British Council include an art collection worth £25.5 million. It is not for sale and held "to increase the understanding and appreciation of British art";
- The Home Office owns the National Stud, including eight stallions with an impressive record in siring winners;
- The Department of Culture, Media and Sport holds the Government Art Collection, consisting of 11,440 paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints in 470 government buildings at home and abroad. It also owns Trafalgar Square, Brompton Cemetery, 58 statues in London, and London's main parks;
- The Department of Trade and Industry owns an authenticated descendant from Isaac Newton's Apple Tree, taken from a cutting in his mother's garden;
- The Ministry of Agriculture owns 18 buffer depots storing emergency food stockpiles "eg, flour, biscuits etc", all for sale. It also has 28 rabies vans and one rabies crew bus;
- The Department of Environment and Transport's Highways Agency owns 14 motorway service stations, most of them on the M1 and M6; and 1,932 surplus properties from scrapped road schemes;
- The Scottish Office owns 48 castles or facilities, and 104,689 hectares in the Highlands, with 1,391 crofts;
- The Forestry Commission owns more than 2.5 million acres of land.



A night to remember

CINEMA
Richard Williams

SINCE Mike Figgis is one of those directors who are consistent only in their unpredictability, it is hardly a surprise to find him following the intensity of Leaving Las Vegas, his unexpected box-office hit of 1995, with a film answering, by and large, to the description of a romantic comedy. But, being Figgis, even his comedy has a bad conscience.

One Night Stand originated in a $4 million script by Joe Eszterhas, the writer of Basic Instinct. But it was accepted by Figgis on the understanding that he could rewrite as much of the story as he wanted. By the time Figgis had completed his rewrite, the only remaining trace of Eszterhas's involvement could be found in the basic notion of two married people having a brief but highly consequential fling.

The result may not exactly be a great film, but it is always identifiably the product of Figgis's particular intelligence, marked by a wit which can turn caustic without compromising his genuine concern for his characters. And, unusually for a comedy, it is about something. About several things, actually, some of them unstated.

Figgis wrote his version of the story thinking that Nicolas Cage might play the lead. When Cage proved unavailable, Figgis invited Wesley Snipes to star opposite Nastassja Kinski as the couple thrown together by an improbable combination of leaking pens, missed flights, and a shared interest in chamber music. And, crucially, he chose to do nothing to modify the story.

That turns out to have been Figgis's second shrewd call. The script of One Night Stand makes not a single reference to the ethnic identities of its leading characters, but one of its most telling moments comes during the course of their initial sexual encounter, when the camera dwells for a second on the sight of Snipes's black hand resting lightly on Kinski's white breast. From such apparent trifles is progress made.

Snipes plays Max, a Hollywood-based director of television commercials visiting New York to see a friend, Charlie (Robert Downey Jr), who has just been diagnosed as HIV positive. Stuck in Manhattan for a night without a hotel reservation, Max ends up going to hear the Julliard Quartet with Karen (Kinski), a businesswoman encountered in the hotel lobby. Later, after dealing decisively with a couple of muggers, he finds himself sharing her room.

Figgis doesn't need to explain the appeal that two such attractive people have for each other. There is perhaps just a degree too much of the coquette in Kinski's smile, but Snipes's courteous reluctance to get involved is well-judged. And when the director eases them discreetly into bed, he resists the temptation to move beyond the languid, drowsy rhythms of the pre-dawn hour, thereby achieving something genuinely sensual.

Both of them return to their unsatisfactory marriages. But — in an absurd contrivance which seriously damages the film — Karen's husband (Kyle MacLachlan) turns out to be Charlie's older brother, a coincidence revealed to Max a year later when he visits the Aids hospital where his friend is dying.

Four hearts in a tangle, as James Brown almost sang, provide the film's third act, although Figgis's deepest interest seems to be in a death-bed conversation between Charlie and Max, whose friendship, like the ethnic question, is never viewed as a reason for surprise or explanation. Downey's performance throughout is a technical marvel, easily the best thing in the film, shading down from the twitchy-bitchy aggression of his first scene — when we can feel the virus running like static in his veins — to big emotions expressed through the flicker of a bloodshot eye above an oxygen mask.

His death is the catalyst for the film's romantic showdown. Typically, Figgis provides what looks like a neat resolution while leaving several frayed ends untrimmed. As we listen to the characters' parting words, and examine their final expressions, we're not quite convinced about the happy-ever-after. Which, from this film-maker, is exactly what we would expect.

In Under the Skin, a 19-year-old woman reacts to the death of her mother by abandoning her job and her steady boyfriend to lose herself in drink and affectless sex. We might well come out of it wondering why so many of the most compelling current films deal in such images of bleakness, and why modern life encourages the belief that the greatest and truest art is derived from pain. But we will not have been wasting our time.



Nastassja Kinski and Wesley Snipes in One Night Stand

A season in hell is certainly in store for the young and vulnerable protagonist of Carine Adler's first film. As the prize-givers at the Toronto and Edinburgh film festivals have already recognised, however, beneath the superficial nihilism lies the sort of redemptive urge familiar from the work of Krzysztof Kieslowski.

This is a film largely by, and entirely about, women. All the men in it are cyphers, while all the women come in three dimensions and full colour. No complaints about that, given the subject and the intention. Adler, who also wrote the screenplay, has a lot to say about the condition of women, and the inevitable lopsidedness never leaves the film spiritually or dramatically undernourished.

After her mother dies of cancer, Iris (Samantha Morton) starts to pick up men in cinemas and bars, using them for sex before confronting them with her indifference. Putting on her mother's old fur coat and blonde wig, even borrowing her sister's name, she makes futile attempts to shed and replace her own identity. Adrift from all moorings, veering from despair to bliss and back, she conspires in her own decline.

It is the achievement of Morton, herself only 19 when the film was made, that Iris's contradictions are made to seem consistent. Morton's range is apparent in the life and conviction she brings to Iris's angry desolation, and in the realism with which she portrays a sexuality that only a fool would take to be nymphomania.

This is a riveting performance, subtly framed by a director who knows, unlike certain of her contemporaries, how to illustrate depravity without appearing to celebrate it.

Beyond mere horseplay

THEATRE
Michael Billington

A BARE black stage. Space defined by expanding circles of light. Actors in colour co-ordinated white and cream costumes. Terry Hands is clearly back in business; and his production of Peter Shaffer's Equus, which is part of an ambitious four-play repertory he is presenting at Theatr Clwyd in North Wales with a team of 23 actors, not only bears his own unmistakable imprint but makes us see the play in a totally new light.

Shaffer's play, first seen in 1973 and rarely revived since, deals with the confrontation between a desiccated shrink, Martin Dysart, and a 17-year-old boy, Alan Strang, who has blinded six horses with a metal spike. Part detective-story, part psychiatric inquiry, the play patiently probes the motives behind a seemingly senseless act of cruelty.

Originally, it seemed part of Shaffer's lifelong obsession with the conflict between Apollo and Dionysus: the boy, with his sado-erotic attitude to horses that finally takes such a savagely destructive form, has access to some quality of "worship" that Dysart, with his package-holidays to the Peloponnese, can only envy.

The play also reflects the late sixties ideas of R D Laing: that psychiatry is a reductive process often restoring patients to society's questionable notion of normality.

All that is still present in the play. But, from today's perspective, it seems much more about Dysart's strange, extra-professional love for this disordered boy: it strikes me as highly significant that Dysart, who hasn't kissed his wife for six years, in a crucial speech which Hands has cunningly transposed, identifies with the horse that seeks to kiss the boy through its chained mouth. And the final image, movingly expressed in this production, is of Dysart clutching the naked boy before throwing his coat, rather than the blanket specified in the stage directions, over him.

I'm not hinting at a sub-text of child abuse. But Hands has grasped the point that Dysart's guilt springs partly from a lack of courage in expressing his own forbidden love.

Hands, by using a visual style that he has often deployed in Shakespeare, also brings out unsuspected links. Very like Prospero or the Duke in Measure For Measure, Dysart is not just a dramatic character but a surrogate playwright who manipulates the action and uses all kinds of tricks and devices to get to the truth.

Oliver Ryan, fresh out of drama school, makes the disturbed Alan a much more actively aggressive figure than I remember from past productions. And, even though the supporting roles are thinly written, Robert Blythe and Lynne Verrall as Alan's warring parents and Siwan Morris as the stable-girl who vainly seduces him, lend them substance.

Obviously Hands's production, with its actors in skeletal equine heads, cannot escape the influence of John Dexter's magisterial original: what it uncovers, however, is the psychiatrist's unarticulated, almost unacknowledged, love for his boy-patient.

Spot the difference

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

THE LIFE of an ambassador, being nomadic and involving much dressing up, mutates easily into a strolling player. Which is why Joanna Lumley's grandfather was an officer of the Raj and she is an actress. Joanna Lumley in **Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon** (BBC1) retraced the journey her grandfather made in 1936. Taking his wife and daughter, he trekked for three-and-a-half months to invest the King of Bhutan with the insignia of Knight Commander of the Indian Empire. A cold coming they had of it. His false teeth froze in their glass.

Joanna took her identically elegant cousin and a TV crew. The commendably professional film their grandfather took seemed to flower into colour in this film. The same men wearing the same clothes seemed to be performing the same dance. Bhutan is frozen in time like grandfather's teeth. The convulsions of the century, the hot war, the cold war, Pop Tarts and Spice Girls seem like the distant whine of gnats in Bhutan.

It is sport to put Joanna Lumley in the wild and watch. She quickly discovered the phenomenon of self-cleaning laundry. That is, a dirty T-shirt, carefully folded, becomes a clean T-shirt in four days.

The royal family of Bhutan were both exotic (there was some talk of eating orchids) yet anglicised. Off-camera a particularly fruity voice cried, "What do you mean, you old bugger?" and "Oh, you darling!" This was Jewel In The Crown stuff. When in England, he added, he always went to Newmarket.

The Englishman and His Horse (Channel 4) was a delightfully teasing documentary about an institution as feudal as Bhutan, the Jockey Club.

The Jockey Club is not a club and only two former professional jockeys are members. It's rather like Edward VII, who, showing off his robes to his grandchildren, said "Don't I look a funny old gentleman?" The Duchess of Beaufort said tartly he was never funny, not old and by no stretch of imagination a gentleman.

This was the club's first tentative toe into television. They hoped to show the stewards "in the right sort of light". Bless them.

The stewards, who enforce the club's rules, are strangely indistinguishable, which is odd because they don't look alike. They are just interchangeably posh. They can, however, be identified by their hats which, though equally daft, have distinctive ribbons. "You can spot 'em a mile off by their hats" as the public relations officer, David Pipe, (ex-cavalry) said.

The director, Riete Oord, had put the crucial question. "Tell me, David about hats." As question marks formed above your head, she invariably voiced them. Like, why do jockeys behave so formally? They stand at a stewards' inquiry, even when they have just fallen on their head. One touched a symbolic forelock.

"Trainer and jockey have an almost a master servant relationship," said the club's deputy PRO. "Everybody has to call somebody 'Sir' except the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Charles," said Peter Walwyn, the trainer. He added, fascinatingly, that stupid, willing horses often won. Clever horses didn't like racing.

Jubilant fiddler of jazz

OBITUARY
Stephane Grappelli

A 1975 New Yorker feature on Stephane Grappelli, who has died aged 89, announced that the Frenchman had by that point in his life pulled level with his temperamental opposite, the gritty and unsentimental Joe Venuti, as the world's greatest jazz violinist — and then added the afterthought that it was rather like declaring a dead heat between the world's two greatest unicyclists. In the two decades since, during which Grappelli pursued his career with what seemed like redoubled enthusiasm, little has happened to shift the rarity value of fiddle players in jazz, though he has done as much as anybody to improve the odds. He has played with everyone from Earl Hines to Yehudi Menuhin, though his most celebrated and influential relationship was with the Belgian Gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt, from the 1930s the most imaginative jazz musician Europe had produced.

Grappelli's playing used to be regarded by the strict cognoscenti as too urbane for jazz, but by the 1970s the extraordinary effervescence and jubilant swing of his work, and the relaxed, rhapsodic fertility of his improvising were widely acknowledged across the idiomatic divides in the music as being as intimately related to the essence of pre-bop jazz as Louis Armstrong's trumpet, or Sidney Bechet's sax. Grappelli's fiddle swung harder than the pulse of many drummers, and his spontaneous lines were better than many songs.

Grappelli played in an ecstatic manner, which celebrated the transcendent qualities of all music, not just jazz. Unlike bebop players, preoccupied with the possible harmonic labyrinths within songs, Grappelli remained closer to the original themes he expanded on, but imparted to them such subtle sheens and spins that they seemed utterly transformed by his amiable intelligence while remaining true to themselves.

His sense of drama and contrast was always startling, in the way he would draw listeners in with cajoling, slowly unfolding variations on romantically sustained notes, then leap suddenly into glistening high-register runs, return tantalisingly to the earlier variation, sometimes oscillate playfully between the two. Unlike the handful of classical violinists who have occasionally played jazz (notably Yehudi Menuhin and Nigel Kennedy), Grappelli's relationship to the underlying pulse as a dynamic rather than static one (stretching and compressing his thoughts against the beat rather than doggedly squatting them on it) gives his music an immense drive and unpredictability.

Grappelli was born in Paris. His unworldly Italian father was always broke ("the first heepie I meet in my life" Grappelli told critic Whitney Balliett) and his mother died when he was four. He spent much of his early life in orphanages, briefly attending Isadora Duncan's dancing school "to personify an angel". The young Grappelli couldn't dance, but he loved listening to the musicians.

Grappelli Snr bought his son an old violin from an Italian cobbler, and they learned together, teaching themselves from books and from watching professionals. This was the way Grappelli was to acquire skills (notably piano playing and cooking as well) throughout life.

When he was 14, Grappelli got a job in a cinema pit band. A year later, he was a street player, working with a guitarist — and earning enough to persuade his father to buy a piano.

Grappelli was to teach himself to play the piano with considerable distinctiveness, with the wistful keyboard playing of cornettist Bix Beiderbecke a key influence, at one stage in his career abandoning the violin completely because he could secure better paid gigs with the piano, and not have to share the fees.

In Paris, Grappelli began to listen to American jazz, whose popularity spread rapidly across Europe in the twenties. He particularly loved the sound of Joe Venuti, a gifted Italian-American who had helped pioneer the violin/guitar jazz format.

After playing jazz-influenced music in the Paul Whiteman manner with Gregor and His Gregorians, an orchestra based in the South of France, Grappelli returned to Paris, having added a little saxophone playing to his repertoire. Then one night in 1934, as he recalled, "this big, dark, funny looking man come in and say 'Hey, I'm looking for a violinist to play'". It was Django Reinhardt.

Reinhardt liked Grappelli's playing, added more guitarists to the line-up, and the band adopted the name of the club then recently started by critic Hugues Panassie — the Hot Club of France. The band soon recorded, and on tracks such as Sweet Sue, Tiger Rag and Lady Be Good, Reinhardt's slashing extemporisations were to astonish the music world. Like Grappelli an unschooled player (who couldn't read anything, let alone music), the Belgian nevertheless had an instinctive harmonic imagination that Grappelli later described as "like a chameleon". The Hot Club recordings have become classics, some featuring expatriate American players such as the great tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins.

After the war, Grappelli's relationship with Reinhardt foundered on the Belgian's unreliability. A peasant who was only a poet when he played, Reinhardt had his watch set to the sun, Grappelli said, so when it was dark he might turn up any time, or not at all.

Reinhardt died young, and in the 1950s the jazz and nightlife scene changed in ways that didn't suit Grappelli's urbane talents, and his career was not to revive until the late 1960s — though he was able to secure a steady living leading a dance-band at the Paris Hilton, despite the disapproval of jazz lovers. But in 1966 he participated in the spectacular Violin Summit project with the young French fusion violin star Jean Luc Ponty and others, and played at the Newport Festival in 1969. Two years later, he was brought together with Menuhin on a Christmas TV special, and in this triumphant splicing of two traditions Grappelli's long journey in the shadow of the departed Reinhardt ended and his musicial life was transformed.

His concerts began to be sell-outs, the partnership with Menuhin was recorded, and festival appearances with Joe Venuti, Gary Burton, Earl Hines and other jazz celebrities quickly followed. Stephane Grappelli was at last reaping just rewards for personifying an elegant, lyrical jazz style that found a new audience at a stage in his life when many consider retirement, and he never lost the exuberance with which he embraced music-making.



Just rewards . . . Stephane Grappelli found a new audience late in life

John Fordham

Stephane Grappelli, jazz violinist, born January 26, 1908; died December 1, 1997

Last rays of an Indian summer

MUSIC
Edward Greenfield

NO LEADING composer, not even Verdi, has had quite such an extended or fruitful Indian summer of creativity as Sir Michael Tippett. Through his 60s, 70s and even his 80s, he produced a sequence of major works which grew ever more adventurous. Here was a composer, a self-confessed late-starter, who at the end of his career more than made up for lost time, refusing to sit on his laurels, always looking for new musical worlds.

In 1988 came his fifth opera, New Year, wilder than those before, followed in 1991 by his extended setting of Yeats's Byzantium, written for Solti and the Chicago Orchestra, and then a fifth String Quartet. One came to expect that the sequence would continue as long as Tippett drew breath, but then, in 1995, first performed at the time of his 90th birthday came another extended half-hour piece, The Rose Lake, an orchestral song without words, as he described it. This time, decisive as ever, Tippett let it be known that it was his last work, a final signing-off.

Sir Colin Davis's superb new recording with the London Symphony Orchestra on Conifer records (75605 51304-2) demonstrates from first to last that The Rose Lake could not provide a richer conclusion, arguably the most beautiful of all his works. It was in 1990 on a visit to Senegal that the 85-year-old composer visited Le Lac Rose, where, at midday, the sun transformed the lake's whitish-green colour to translucent pink. Seeing it had an overwhelming effect on Tippett, and it led to this musical evocation of the lake from dawn to dusk, centred round the climactic mid moment when the lake is in full song.

The 12 sections, sharply delineated, form a musical arch, with the lake-song represented in five of them on soaring unison strings in free variation form, with Tippett positively inspired by his closely balanced structure, following Byzantium in the warmth of its lyricism and evocative orchestral colourings, a piece that seems to sum up so much from each period of his career.

That culminating masterpiece is well coupled on the disc with Tippett's own 1971 recording, until now unavailable on CD, of his cantata, The Vision Of St Augustine, first heard in 1965. It is a work which, in its new sounds, can now be seen as a turning point in Tippett's career, the beginning of the adventurous Indian summer. Tippett's reading is more expansive, more atmospheric, if less tautly drawn than the existing CD version from David Atherton on BBC Radio Classics.

Yet Tippett himself, even more than Atherton, conveys the mystery behind this fascinating work.

Michael Tippett: The Rose Lake is arguably his most beautiful work

Triumph over adversity

BALLET
Judith Mackrell

SCOTTISH BALLET'S Christmas show, currently in rep, is a revival of Frederick Ashton's perennial charmer La Fille Mal Gardée, the story of a young woman, Lise, who outwits her mother's grand marriage plans to embrace her true but humble love, Colas, which, like all proper pastorals, sweetly points out the vanity of misplaced ambition. It also has odd parallels with events that have been traumatising Scottish Ballet.

Six years ago, the company appointed Galina Samsova as its director, only to find that, rather like Lise's mother, she had big plans for its future. Samsova's ambitions were controversial, with critics arguing that Scotland didn't need and couldn't afford a wannabe Royal Ballet. This year the controversy boiled over into a series of political and financial crises. The board and Samsova were forced to resign, leaving the company with no artistic director and a Christmas season to salvage.

But the dance world looks after its own. While Samsova was still director, David Bintley of Birmingham Royal Ballet offered to lend the sets and costumes for Ashton's Fille. Wayne Sleep agreed to make a comeback and dance his old role of Lise's rich but simple suitor, Alain. And the punters have reacted with gratifying enthusiasm to a ballet that hasn't been seen in Scotland for 20 years but happens to be one of Ashton's most perfectly constructed works.

But it's the performers who make it live. And while most of the cast danced with infectious high spirits, a couple of the principals laboured with their roles. The larky, flirtatious hero Colas, for instance, ought to set the comic tone of the ballet. Yet not only was Campbell McKenzie's forced roguishness unconvincing, but his muscular dance style looked almost cumbersome in the deftly steppy passages.

Yurie Shinohara as Lise started out by flashing too many automatic smiles. But as she developed the role, she became animated with real mischief and her dancing captured all the quick, tart and outrageously pretty qualities of her character.

Sleep got miles of fun out of his role's hilarious tangle-footed choreography. Unfortunately, he never got beyond the comedy routine to the character. Still, he kept the energy fizzing, and the corps sparkled with him, dancing crisply and with an easy, untucked gaiety. The company was clearly out to prove it's back in business.

Locked in, shut out

Jack Straw

Dark Heart: The Shocking Truth About Hidden Britain
by Nick Davies
Chatto & Windus 308pp £16.99

"*THERE* is no such thing as society," Margaret Thatcher once blurted out. The admission was an accident. The policy was not. As Nick Davies's book shows, this re-creation of the worst aspects of 19th century liberalism was entirely deliberate, and was excused morally by philosophers such as F A Hayek who confidently, but preposterously, declared that the phrase "'social justice' is . . . simply a semantic fraud". So one buttress after another to an inclusive society was removed in the Thatcher experiment of the eighties.

My own constituency of Blackburn has, post-war, been more prosperous than many similar towns of the Northwest. But I have never forgotten what the place felt like, the pall of depression which fell on the town, when in 1981 and 1982 factories and mills seemed to close almost weekly, and what should have been the fixed points of people's lives simply disappeared. To some extent, we are still reaping the whirlwind from that period.

Though UK unemployment is now 5.6 per cent, there is a sizeable group who live outside what the rest of us would describe as normal society. Two, sometimes three, generations where children have never experienced the man of the house (and I mean man) getting up and going to work. It is this area, the poorest, where you are most likely to be the victim of a crime.

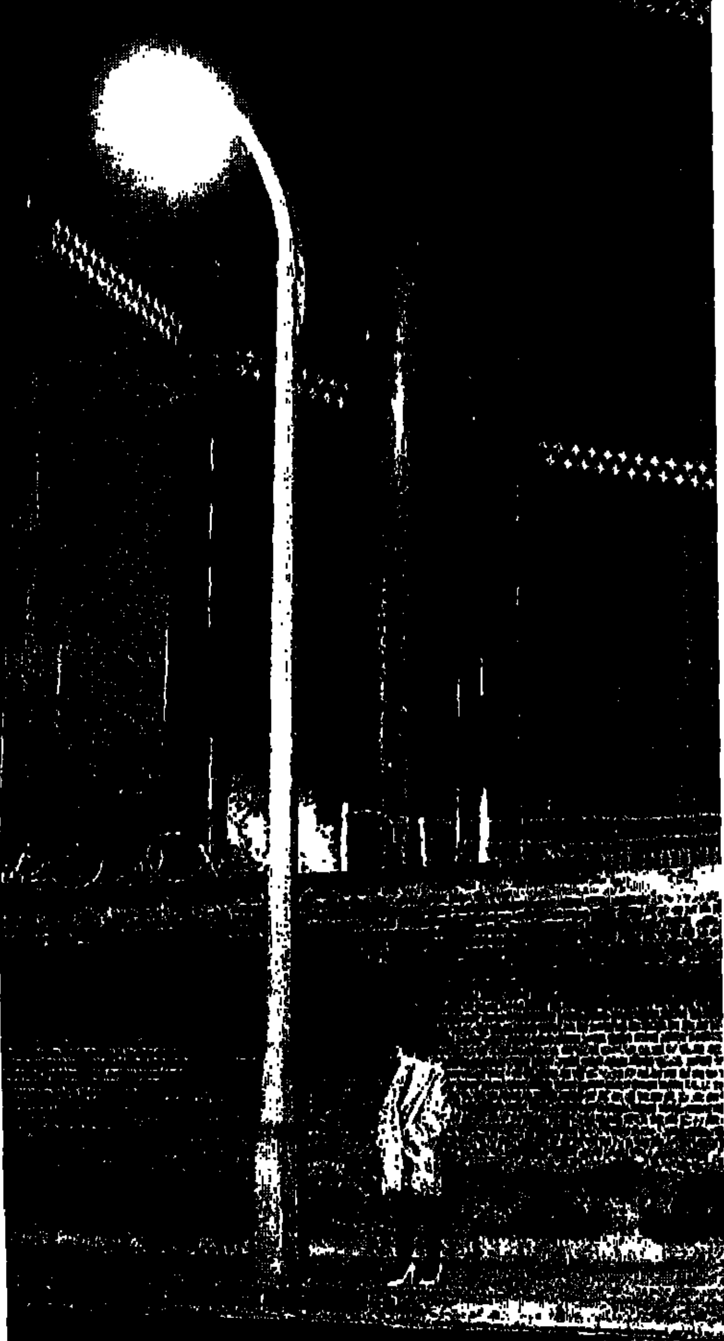
Nick Davies describes this process of social exclusion on a grander and more terrifying scale, as it has afflicted many of Britain's much larger cities. The book should be required reading not for its analysis, but for the accuracy and controlled anger of its descriptions.

Henry Mayhew, the anthropologist of the Victorian poor, and William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, are both quoted in Dark Heart. Davies has learnt something from each of them. Describing some children — male and female — who had drifted into prostitution, he says: "There are children who think they are adults, who think pleasure is the same as pain, who think sex in the back of a car is the same as affection, who think that money is the root of all life and that power is the only point, who can be roped, raped, beaten, buggered and abused and still come back for more, because for them, in some mysterious fashion which they themselves most certainly cannot explain, this is the logical way to lead their lives."

And then there is Jean's story: Jean who lived for 23 years in the Hyde Park area of Leeds (an area I remember from my student days), but who was then driven out after she had decided to take on the drug dealers and the youngsters who were completely out of control on her estate. "There were children, but not the kind of children who had once lived here . . . These children were wild and hard and impervious to pain — theirs and anyone else's. Something inside them was different. And they had won." So Jean had to be moved, within 24 hours, protected by a police escort.

This is a good book, and it will shock many to the quick, that all this could be happening under their noses. But where Davies is wrong is in his rather arrogant assumption that "the Labour Government" (ie, people like me) have never met the young tearaways or the single mothers in Hyde Park. For all its imperfections, one of the prevailing strengths of the British political system is that it is rooted in real communities. You can be as high and mighty as you like, but come Friday evening, you've got to be there, in the community centre, waiting for all-comers to ask your help.

I've seen plenty of Jeans in recent years — people hounded nearly to death by the appalling, unspeakable behaviour of others. But the perpetrators turn up, too. One night, a Jean figure, an elderly woman, completely perplexed about why she had been victimised, arrived. Then, half an hour later, her "assailant", a drug addict and single mother who had fallen into prostitution, came to see me as well.


Outsiders . . . a prostitute in Kings Cross, London PHOTO: STEVE PYKE

Davies writes powerfully of the sense of despair and frustration of the many decent, dedicated people in child care about their power, or lack of it, to intervene effectively in these damaged children's lives. The modern history of the state as parent is not a happy one. Children's rights are important; but the most important right of a child is to be a child, to have adults take responsibility for you until you can reasonably take it for yourself. We won't recreate that inclusive society unless we can redefine how the state — the parent of last resort — should deal with the children, the terrifying heart of Davies's book.

Jack Straw is the Home Secretary

Taking the ghost route

Veronica Horwell

Lone Star Swing
by Duncan McClean
Jonathan Cape 312pp £9.99

A Walk in the Woods
by Bill Bryson
Doubleday 320pp £16.99

DUNCAN McCLEAN afforded four weeks in Texas on prize money from the W Somerset Maugham Award. He had passed his driving test at home in Orkney only the month before and hired a car to motor about the state, ears pricked for the sound of his adored West Texas swing music. Bill Bryson, who lives in New Hampshire, meant to spend a whole spring and summer hiking 2,100 miles of the Appalachian Trail up through the US's eastern side. He bought 40lb of most superior gear and did 800 unconsecutive miles.

Well, I had to be paid to read Bryson and it was harder going than he found the Appalachian Trail. Muddy and cold and lonely, and that's just the prose. This is a man looking for copy, not for life. To him people are material; he repeatedly describes those he meets as stupid, obnoxious and self-absorbed. And he doesn't much like the woods either.

I think Bryson meant to tell the truth about the kind of journey that goes to pieces underfoot — as most journeys do, of course; but real honesty would have required him not to write the book and he's too deep into the author business for that.

I'm not asking him into my tent however icky the drizzle. Whereas any time McLean wants to go dancin' to the rhythms of Latinos & Norteno at the Presidio Onion Festival in the Tex-Mex borderlands in a 100-degree heat, I'll be there.

A few years ago he found in an Edinburgh junk shop one scratchy LP of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, that jazzy twangy swing which was the music of the middle of America from the mid-1930s to mid-Elvis, a synthesis of every ethnic possibility from Czech to black to Hispanic. It seems to have blessed him.

That music, he writes terrifically, made "celebration out of desperation", and he respects and loves those who made it in all their daft fallibility. Without sentiment, Lone Star Swing twice made me cry. It's a densely inhabited book even when McLean is driving through ghost towns; he is reconciled to the bad narratives of this world — Wills's personal life was messy, and his professional one no bland resumé of success. And McLean is so excited by the mundanity of a somewhere else he has long desired to be, by the food, the surreal conversations,

Making news and breaking it

Paddy Ashdown

The Guardian Year '97
ed John Ezard
intro Alan Rusbridger
Fourth Estate 256pp £12.99pbk

IN A LETTER to Colonel Edward Carrington on January 16, 1787, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "The basis of our Government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate for a moment to prefer the latter."

Now I'm not suggesting we move Parliament from Westminster to 119 Farringdon Road, but after reading the Guardian Year '97 (the 45th annual collection of Guardian writing) it would be hard to come up with a more pertinent quote. 1997 was a significant year for the Guardian as well as for the political life of our country.

As the editor, Alan Rusbridger, recalls in his introduction, in the space of eight months the newspaper found itself at the centre of half a dozen legal and political battles (the culmination of three years of reporting on corruption charges), which led to the resignation of a member of the cabinet and three ministers, and produced a burst of official reports designed to raise the standards of conduct in public life.

These sequences of events are reprinted here and make compelling reading. Remarkably, when I read them again, months after they happened, the whole episode seems so much worse. It is difficult to fathom just how deep the Conservatives got themselves mired in sleaze. And even harder to believe the outright arrogance with which they faced up to these transgressions.

But you would be mistaken if you believed articles about Tory sleaze were all that the Guardian printed over the past 12 months. Naturally, with an anthology we are presented with the paper's highs over the past year, and there is certainly depth and breadth in the writing — the humour in Matthew Norman's "Diary of a hypochondriac" for instance, or the sharp satire in Simon Hoggart's parliamentary sketches.

There are also some very moving pieces. The book opens with the tragic events surrounding Princess Diana's death. Ben Pimlott reflects: "You cannot be a sentient human being and not feel grief and horror at Diana's death — the suddenness of it, the folly of it. The shots of people weeping in the street spoke for many tears privately shed." There is a heartfelt piece by Martin Woollacott — "Bangladesh's story written in blood" — in which the author comes across the dead body of a young man, recently shot in the chest. "He was good looking and well made, dressed in khaki military shirt and trousers, a middle-class boy of perhaps 22. Bodies seen at a distance or contorted or thrown about are one thing, but this was a strange moment of intimacy of a very different kind. We stood over him like mourners. For a second or two I saw him as his mother, father or sister would have seen him, as a loved one lost and gone."

The book includes some disturbing pieces about the state of the health service; indeed the article by Richard Phillips — "Diary of an NHS patient" — and Kate Hine's "Diary of an NHS defector" should be required reading for anyone working in the Department of Health.

I cannot single out every article here, yet what this collection shows is that journalism is not transitory but, as Rusbridger writes, a rough cut of history. The contributions paint a picture of change — the clamour for it and the realities of it. And although it is a cliché to say that the events of the past 12 months were portentous, these pages show that 1996/7 really was a momentous time of change for Britain. This is an enjoyable book, worth mulling over.

To order a copy of the Guardian Year '97 at the special price of £10, contact CultureShop

The wizard of odd

Philip French

Stanley Kubrick: A Biography
by John Baxter
HarperCollins 399pp £20

BERTRAND TAVERNIER, the best director at work in Europe today, resigned as French publicist for A Clockwork Orange (aka Orange Mécanique) with a cable sent to Stanley Kubrick c/o Warner Brothers, Hollywood: "I resign Stop As a film-maker you are a genius but as an employer you are an imbecile." The vice-president of the Warner advertising department responded, not by springing to Kubrick's defence but by framing the cable on his wall and inviting Tavernier to choose a 16mm copy of any movie from its archives.

Indeed, as John Baxter reveals in his judicious and well-researched book, most people who have come into contact with Kubrick over the past 50 years share this sentiment. To composer Leonard Rosenman, who arranged the music for Barry Lyndon, Kubrick is "brilliant, but he reduces everyone to slaves". When Arthur C Clarke, his collaborator on 2001, was asked how much he would have to be paid to work with him again, he confided in fellow science fiction writer Brian Aldiss: "He hasn't got that much money."

Born in New York in 1928, the only son of a successful Jewish doctor, Kubrick never lacked for money. The early documentaries and the two low-budget features on which he learnt his craft were largely financed by his own savings and well-off relatives. He belonged to the last wave of film-makers to arise before film school became the principal means of entering the industry. Paul Newman once observed that America's two most original directors ("that doesn't mean that they're good") came from that generation — Kubrick and the equally uncompromising John Cassavetes.

The first stage of Kubrick's career took place in the post-war decade. As a schoolboy, his idols were the harsh candid cameraman, Weegee, and the exhibitionist jazz-drummer, Gene Krupa. In his late teens, he became a self-educated Greenwich Village intellectual with a passion for chess. The second stage came in the late 1950s after he'd penetrated Hollywood with the low-budget thriller, The Killing, and the elegant anti-war picture, Paths Of Glory.

At the age of 28, Kubrick was being written up as Hollywood's most European director and became a prestigious talent, courted by ambitious actors such as Kirk Douglas and Marlon Brando. Douglas, the producer-star of the multi-million dollar Spartacus, hired him in the erroneous belief that he would be his contented servant. Instead, Kubrick flexed his muscles from the start, hiring and firing actors, cavalierly taking over from veteran cinematographer Russell Metty (who got an Oscar for work done by Kubrick), and even proposing that he be credited as writer if the blacklisted Dalton Trumbo's name could not appear on the picture.

His high ambition, mad perfectionism, or whatever you choose to call it, started to crystallise with Spartacus. Once he had embarked on big-budget productions, there was no going back. Although his films were invariably adapted from books and were in defined genres, he has been a driven auteur pursuing personal themes about rebellious outsiders, the conflict between human fallibility and perfect plans,


2001: A Space Odyssey . . . would HAL tell us anything about Kubrick?

the impossibility of imposing rational systems on an irrational universe. Every simple undertaking became an epic — the epic science fiction movie 2001, the epic teen-flick Clockwork Orange, the epic horror film The Shining, the epic Vietnam war movie, Full Metal Jacket. He turned himself into a legend, a recluse, living since 1961 in British exile, his pictures made at ever increasing intervals on ever longer shooting schedules.

The greater the disdain with which he treated the Hollywood moguls, the more they seemed to respect him. Challenging the Hollywood system from within by permanently relocating abroad, Kubrick established a form of independence that few moviemakers have achieved. But unlike Joseph Losey, the American émigré who most powerfully tapped into British society, Kubrick has no roots in this or any other culture. For all his fastidiousness, he remains a show-business figure and he reminds one of the humourless Hollywood mogul who so amused S J Perelman. This studio boss decided to spend a year alone in a remote Himalayan cave, clad only in a loincloth, silently contemplating the meaning of life — but having the Hollywood Reporter delivered to him every day.

New fiction

Lucy Atkins

No Man's Land, by Barry England (Cape, 14.99)

THIRTY years after his first novel, Figures In A Landscape, was shortlisted for the Booker, Barry England has produced a second, as manly as the first, but also introducing resolutely tough female characters. An unspecified disaster known as "The Event" has killed millions; those few survivors have fled to a new Capital while the army tries to control scavenging villains who loot and rape. The hero is part-killer, part-Messianic saviour, leading his selected group of refugees to the Promised Land.

Eve's Apple, by Jonathan Rosen (Granta, £9.99)

JOSEPH'S girlfriend Ruth, a New York artist, is neurotic about food. She exercises frantically, monitors every mouthful, and at 112lb, thinks she's fat. When she vomits up her supper, he develops his own obsession, trying to discover all he can about her condition in order to "save" her. The cleverly written beginning gradually sinks beneath the weight of philosophising.

On Earth as It Is, by Steven Heighton (Granta, £9.99)

DEATH and misunderstanding are pitted against the transcendent possibilities of love in these sensitive, and thankfully often ironic, stories. Displaced people — a Cambodian Canadian in Banff, a tourist in Kathmandu — mingle with domestic familiarity: an old married couple; the tedium of working in a diner. Thought-provoking and delicately written, if occasionally a little self-conscious.

Anthony Julius salutes the Canadian winner of this year's Guardian Fiction Award

After Auschwitz

JUDGING the Guardian Fiction Award prompted the thought that the much bigger contest, the one between the two literary forms of the novel and poetry, has already been won. The novel reigns, in part because it has incorporated much of what poetry formerly was expected to do. It thus doesn't seem surprising that the Canadian Anne Michaels, an accomplished poet, should turn to the novel as if, completing her literary apprenticeship, she has passed from a minor, to the major, literary form. Fugitive Pieces triumphantly vindicates the novel's ascendancy over poetry.

This remarkable novel has qualities one associates with poetry: intensity, precision, and a celebration of epiphanies — moments of vision, out of time. But it is also faithful to the novel's task, to unfold character in time. The novel's language is enrapturing, the fate of its characters involving. The prose has a vivacity which matches that of the lives it explores. It thus keeps the reader suspended between two pleasures — to pause, and to read onward. One looks up to reflect, one turns the page.

Fugitive Pieces is a demonstration of how the novelist can reconcile poetry with narrative. Most novelists sacrifice the one to the other. Those we value least (but buy


Anne Michaels PHOTO: DAVID SILLITOE

the most) sacrifice poetry to narrative. Those we value rather more tend to write novels that lack all momentum. Once in a while, however, a writer comes along who pulls off the miracle of combining a poet's grasp of language with a storyteller's gift for suspense. Anne Michaels is such a writer.

Still, even if the novel dominates, it is also in retreat. If it is the modern literary form, it also quails before the subject of our time, which is the Holocaust. How may the writer encompass this event without diminishing it? Nothing should be beyond the novelist's reach, and when a subject presents itself which appears to be, the novelist has a particular duty to address it. Michaels does this.

There is something ugly about being "literary" — even worse, "poetic" — about the Holocaust. But Fugitive Pieces demonstrates that a more optimistic response to the challenge is possible. And that is something to be immensely grateful for, because not only is there no reason in principle why the Holocaust should defeat literary representation but to allow it to do so would seem like giving a posthumous victory to its perpetrators.

Fugitive Pieces is in two parts. In the first, a young boy, Jakob Beer, is rescued from a Polish city by a Greek geologist, Athos Roussos, who takes him to his island home where they endure enemy occupation. Jakob becomes a poet, and emigrates with Athos to Toronto. He marries, divorces, and marries again. In the second part, the narrator is a university professor, exploring his relationship with his wife and with his Holocaust survivor parents through his engagement with Beer's life and work. It is a novel in love with geology, in the subtlest of ways inviting readers to think of its distinct parts as strata, the second built on the first, bearing its own shape and design but at a height and contour registering its debt to what it succeeds.

The shortlist comprised Fugitive Pieces by Anne Michaels (Bloomsbury, £15.99); Jack Maggs by Peter Carey (Faber, £15.99); Love And Longing In Bombay by Vikram Chandra (Faber, £12.99); Easy Peasy by Lesley Glaister (Bloomsbury, £14.99); Enduring Love by Ian McEwan (Cape, £15.99); and Larry's Party by Carol Shields (Fourth Estate, £16.99)

Landmarks of the future

Paul Evans

COLD winds, morning frosts, pouring rain — these last few days have seen the old oaks shredded. Only young trees hold their leaves against winter's greying tide.

This has been a fiery year for *Quercus*: in the alchemy of autumn's furnace, bronze, gold and ochre lit their foliage. But this already seems a brief burn — one more flash in the strobe of oakish history. Now these leaves, wet and blown, fill the air with the smell of brown ale — a heady lure to lean against the bark, intoxicated by myth.

The oak is the tree into which the divine warrior Lleu flew, in the form of an eagle, after he was tricked into his "death" by his wife Blodeuwedd. For this she was turned into an owl. Images from the Celtic twilight of white-robed druids cutting mistletoe with golden sickles; of medieval greenwoods and romantic heroes; of hiding kings and invincible navies — all come from an ancient relationship with the oak. The British have more old oak trees than any other country in Europe, but many people are worried that these important landmarks are disappearing without being replaced.

If they're not really relevant to today's world, then the old oaks may not survive our insidious cynicism. It takes a living vernacular tradition to bridge the gulf between people and nature.

This oak tree I visit nearly every day, though very old, has never known an eagle. But there is something accusatorial in the way the crows throw their heads forward from its topmost branches and krauk into the morning rain. And Blodeuwedd still haunts these fields in the tawny night. Into the dark boughs of this big old tree slips a crowd of redwings, a charm of goldfinch, a chattering of starlings, a murder of crows. This is a tribal gathering place for birds. The pathways round it bear witness to less formal visits by people who walk their dogs, ride their bikes or jog past its great trunk. It's a boundary tree, where boundaries have been erased. It's a landmark tree, in a land of amnesia. But something of whatever has happened here over several centuries never leaves, locked in each year's ring inside the tree.

Times change: for every tryst, fight, pause, step beneath this tree, something remains. Where pigs snuffled for acorns, cars now queue on the new road; where deer belled in rut, police sirens blare; where wind whistled through the wood, the electricity pylon crackles in winter fog. This tree has been as much a part of our dwelling as it has for the birds and insects that have dwelt in it for centuries.

The past week was National Tree Week. The initiative is now prefixed with the name of an oil company which needs no further advertisement here.

This year focused on "landmark trees" and how they are special to us. Activities included planting trees from seeds or cuttings of locally distinctive trees that will grow to become landmarks of the future; replacing lost landmark trees that can be found on old maps; and celebrating existing landmark trees with events. A million trees are expected to have been planted during the week.

This may seem like a cart-before-the-horse way of ascribing significance to trees; an instant heritage. Old trees, like memory, are not tradable commodities. The magic of a landmark tree comes from the relationship between people and the tree itself, its own character, and this cannot be prescribed for, any more than memory can. Whatever we lose from our memory, the old trees keep. When we lose them we are not free of the past, only lost to the future.



ILLUSTRATION: BARRY LARKING

Chess Leonard Barden

MARK HEBDEN, the 39-year-old Leicester grandmaster, has achieved a record-equalling maximum 200 points in the £3,000 Leigh Grand Prix, Britain's year-long national league for congress players. Hebden matched Michael Adams's 1992 record when he won all five games at the Scarborough Open.

More than 20,000 UK congress players take part each year in the Grand Prix or its associated contests. To win, you have to beat the best: Susan Lalic, Luke McShane and the blind expert Graham Lilley lead the women's, junior and handicapped sections, while Adams is second in the Grand Prix.

The points structure rewards totals of 90 per cent or higher, and this is no accident. Chess history (Alekhine at San Remo, Fischer against Taimanov and Larsen, even Karpov trying to beat Kasparov 6-0 in their first series) shows that the greatest masters still strive for extra wins when draws will suffice.

Translated to the Leigh Amateur Prix for grading-limited tournaments, this means going for 4½ or 5 when you are tired at the end of a weekender or one-day rapidplay, even when 4/5 ensures first prize. Very few players can consistently motivate themselves to this extent.

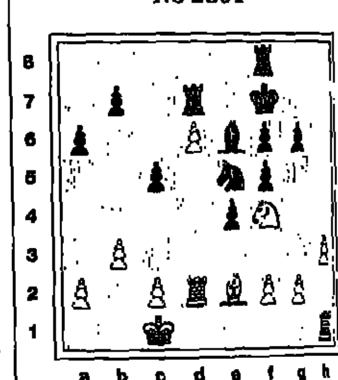
J Burnett-M Hebden

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 g3 g6 3 Bg2 Bg7 4 0-0 0-0 5 c4 Nc6 6 Nc3 d6 7 d4 Rb8 8 d5?! Hebden is playing the well-known Panno system without the usual a6, so White could try 8 Qa4 Nd7 9 d5 Nb6 10 Qc2 Na5 11 b3. **Na5 9 Nd2 Nd7 10 Qc2 Ne5 11 b3 c6 12 Bb2 b5!** Black's sly move order has proved more flexible than the Panno with a6 or the Yugoslav with c5.

13 cxb5 cxb5 14 h3 b4 15 Nce4 Qb6 16 Kh2 Ba6 17 Nf3? Falling for a tactic; White should try 17 f4. **Rbc8 18 Qd2 Nac4! 19 bxc4 Nxc4 20 Qg5 Nxb2 21 Qxe7 Qd8!** Forcing the exchange of queens keeps Black's control. **22 Qxd6 Qxd6 23 Nxd6 Rcd8 24 Ne4 Rxd5 25 Rfc1 Bxe2 26 Rc[illegible] Ra5 27 Nd6 b3! 28 Resigns.**

● Garry Kasparov scored 9-0 in a clock simul at Oakham School, which has chess on the curriculum and is launching a Kasparov scholarship for Russian pupils chosen by the world champion. His quickest win (against Richard Pert) went 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 c3 Nf6 4 Be2 g6 5 0-0 Bg7 6 Bb5+ Nbd7 7 Re1 a6 8 Bf1 0-0 9 d4 e5 10 dxe5 dxe5 11 a4 Qc7 12 Na3 Rd8 13 Qc2 b6 14 Nd2 h6 15 Ndc4 Bb7 16 f3 Bc6 17 b4 cxb4 18 cxb4 Rac8 19 Be3 Qb8 20 Qf2 Bxa4 21 Nxb6 Rc6? 22 Nxa4 Resigns.

No 2501



Thomas Middleton v Akiba Rubinstein, Barmen 1905. White (to move) was an unknown English amateur, Black one of the all-time greats. Black is doing well, ready to round up the d6 pawn by Rfd8, Kg7 and Nf7. When Middleton hesitantly plonked his h1 rook at e1 instead of the obvious d1, Rubinstein decided his opponent had [illegible] and quickly answered 1 Rhe1 Rf[illegible] What happened next?

No 2500: 1 Kf6 Rc6+ 2 Ke5 [illegible] (continuing to check by R[illegible] loses to 3 Kd6 Rc8 4 Re1 Kg7 5 R[illegible]) 3 Kg6!! Kh7 4 Rc6! Ra8 5 Kf6. [illegible] the WK is covered against checks and White wins by Re6 and R[illegible]. Super-GMs Shirov and Lalic were among those defeated by [illegible] endgame.

Quick crossword no. 395

Across

1 Parent (6)
4 Parent (6)
9 Very austere (7)
10 Check growth of — daring feat (5)
11 Picker of Premium Bond winners (5)
12 Twist together (7)
13 Two-hundredth anniversary (11)
18 Tuft of hair over horse's hoof (7)
20 Jewish spiritual leader (5)
22 Lesser white heron (5)
23 Pasta strips used in soups (7)
24 Reserved, quite (6)
25 Climb (6)

Down

1 Quicker (6)
2 Mark, writer of Tom Sawyer (5)
3 Utmost (7)
5 Start — attack (5)
6 Transporter of goods by road (7)
7 Decayed (6)
8 Guarantee — project (11)
14 Meantime (7)
15 Apprehensive (7)
16 Insult (6)
17 Tinted hair lightly (6)
19 Exterior — ring on target (5)
21 Contradict (5)

Last week's solution

```
TOOL#SPITEFUL
R#B#M#I#R#E#A
AVERAGE#ALLOW
N#B#S#C#M#U#N
SHEET#EXPECT#
E###I#S###C#C
PRINCEOFPEACE
T#N###F#A###L
#ESCAPE#LEGAL
A#P#C#I#L#A#U
SPEAR#GAINFUL
I#C#I#H#D#F#A
ANTIDOTE#TEAR
```

Bridge Zia Mahmood

THE final of the Venice Cup, the women's World Championship, was between two teams whose paths through the qualifying stages were in violent contrast. The US team had recovered from a deficit of more than 50 IMPs against Canada to win the quarter-final by just 2 IMPs. In the semi-finals, they had played the second American team, and won by 12 IMPs in a match which was close every inch of the way.

Meanwhile China had thrashed a strong British team by 74 IMPs in the quarter-final, and handed out the same kind of treatment to France in the semi. It appeared to most observers that the Chinese were the team in form, and would be suffering far less from their previous exertions.

But Mildred Breed and Toby Sokolow, Marinesa Letizia and Lisa Berkowitz, Jill Meyers and Randi Montin produced one more supreme effort to overcome the Chinese and win the Venice Cup by the convincing margin of 65 IMPs. This was a bitter blow for the Chinese women, who had also finished second in last year's Olympiad.

They play a hugely aggressive game, creating pressure whenever possible during the bidding and playing the cards with great accuracy.

But, when confronted with experienced opponents who can absorb the pressure, their lack of experience at the very highest level is the telling factor against them. Any top-level player will tell you that if only she could make the right opening lead on every deal, she would be the best player in the world. Take the West cards on this deal from the Venice Cup final, and make your choice:

♠J 10 9 8 7 5 3 ♥A 10 6 2 ♦K ♣4

This has been the bidding:

South	West	North	East
2♣(1)	2♠	4♦(2)	Pass
4♠(3)	Pass	6♣	Pass
Pass	Pass		

(1) Natural, showing a club suit and 11-15 points. (2) Blackwood with clubs agreed as trumps (3) One ace, or the king of clubs.

Worried that East would have a long diamond suit that could provide discards for heart losers, the Chinese West player led the ace of hearts. But this was the full deal:

North
♠A Q
♥9 5 3
♦A Q 6 5
♣A Q 8 5

West
♠J 10 9 8 7 5 3
♥A 10 6 2
♦K
♣4

East
♠6 4 2
♥Q 4
♦J 10 8 7 3
♣10 7

South
♠K
♥K J 8 7
♦9 4
♣K J 9 6 3 2

After the lead of the ace of hearts, declarer had no problem in collecting 12 tricks. In the other room, South had shown a heart suit during the bidding, so West knew that the ace of hearts would be dangerous. She led a spade, and there was no way home for the Chinese declarer. The USA gained 14 IMPs on the deal, the biggest swing of the Venice Cup final.

Football Scottish Coca-Cola Cup final: Celtic 3 Dundee Utd 0

Celtic win catchweight contest

Patrick Glenn at Ibrox

A COCA-COLA Cup final that had been considered potentially the most delicately balanced in years turned out to be a catchweight contest, with Celtic the heavyweights against the bantams of Dundee United.

The Parkhead side's 4-0 league victory over Sunday's opponents two weeks earlier had been perceived as an irrelevance, but it turned out to be the most reliable form guide of all. Andreas Thom, 10 minutes from the end, squandered a golden chance to repeat the scoreline.

Celtic had not won the trophy for 15 years, but the famine was ended when Marc Rieper and Henrik Larsson scored the first two goals within two minutes of each other before the interval. Craig Burley's headed third was a proper reward for a player who has had a huge influence on the Parkhead side since his move from Chelsea.

Not even the most wildly optimistic Celtic supporter could have fantasised that burst of scoring midway through the first half, giving their team a plump cushion on which to relax.

Certainly the Glasgow side had already established an unmissable superiority during the opening 20 minutes, clearly able to handle the occasion much more readily than their opponents, who seemed to be uncharacteristically unsettled by anxiety. But Celtic had only mildly bothered Sieb Dykstra, and the two goals, from Rieper after 21 minutes and then Larsson, had seemed improbable. United's uncertainty during that opening quarter had made them appear vulnerable but not collapsible.

The slipshod passing of the Dundee side had already given Celtic possession in threatening areas but, before the goals, Dykstra had to deal only with a straight shot from Morten Wieghorst and a run from Larsson, the goalkeeper diving at the Swede's feet to smother the ball as he ran into the box.

Wieghorst was at the heart of the opener, teasing the United defence towards him as he carried the ball in from the right and chipping perfectly to Rieper. The big defender, without a challenge, bulleted his header to the left of Dykstra from only six yards.

United paid the severest penalty for their nervous, untidy passing when Celtic scored their second. Mark Perry, under no pressure, carelessly rolled the ball straight to Larsson, who immediately headed through the middle towards goal. His right-foot shot from 20 yards struck the outstretched foot of the lunging Maurice Malpas and the ball shot high into the air, looped over Dykstra and landed in the net.

Those goals holed United below the waterline, keeping them more preoccupied with preventing further damage than with fighting back. Indeed it was their general failure to make an impact on the Celtic defence which was most notable about their performance.

By the time Celtic scored their third, their opponents could reflect only on the long-range shooting of Kjell Olofsson as any kind of threat to Jonathan Gould. Those attempts were powerfully struck and occasionally only marginally wide but they were no substitute for dismantling a defence with the telling pass.

Olofsson, in fact, had sent another 30-yard free-kick narrowly wide of Gould's right-hand post before Celtic, in the 59th minute, grabbed their third.

Snapshot . . . Larsson scores Celtic's second goal PHOTO: ALAN HARVEY

Football results

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP: [illegible]al 0, Liverpool 1; Barnsley 2, Leeds Utd [illegible]; [illegible]ton Wndrs 1, Wimbledon 0, Chelsea 4, [illegible] Co 0, Coventry City 0, Leicester City 2; [illegible]al Palace 1, Newcastle Utd 2; Everton 0, [illegible]ham 2, Manchester Utd 4, Blackburn 0, [illegible]ampton 2, Sheff Wed 3; West Ham 2, [illegible] Villa 1, Bolton Wndrs 1, Newcastle Utd 0.
Leading positions: 1, Man Utd (played 16-[illegible] 34); 2, Chelsea (16-31); 3, Blackburn ([illegible]).

NATIONWIDE LEAGUE:
Division One: Birmingham 2, Portsmouth 1, [illegible]ford 2, Norwich 1; Huddersfld 2, Bury 0, [illegible]ch 0, Nottingham Forest 1; [illegible]sbrough 1, WBA 0; Oxford 2, Port [illegible] 0, Sheff Utd 1, Crewe 0; Stockport 3, [illegible] City 1; Stoke 1, Reading 2; Sunderlnd 3, Tranmere 0, Wolves 3, QPR 2.
Leading positions: 1, Nottingham Forest ([illegible]-41), 2, Middlesbro (19-38); 3, WBA (19-37).

Division Two: Brentford 1, Wrexham 1; Bristol R 2, Millwall 1; Burnley 2, Northmptn 1; [illegible] 0, Bristol City 3; Chesterfld 1, Southend 0; Gillingham 0, Grimsby 2; Plymouth 0, Oldham 2; Preston 3, Fulham 1; Walsall 2, Blackpool 1; Watford 2, Wigan 1; Wycombe 1, Bournemth 1; York 1, Luton 2.
Leading positions: 1, Watford (20-48); 2 Bristol City (20-42); 3, Millwall (19-32).

Division Three: Barnet 2, Darlington 0; Cambridge 2, Hartlepool 0; Cardiff 1, Scarboro 1, Chester 1, Exeter 1; Hull 3, Doncaster 0; Lncoln 1, Macclesfld 1; Mansfield 0, Leyton Orient 0, Notts Co 2, Peterborough 2; Rochdale 0, Torquay 1; Rotherham 3, Colchester 2; Scunthorpe 0, Brighton 2; Shrewsbury 0, Swansea 1.
Leading positions: 1, Lincoln City (20-37); 2, Peterborough (20-36); 3, Exeter (20-35).

SCOTTISH COCA-COLA CUP: Final: Celtic 3, Dundee Utd 0.

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE:
Premier Division: Hibernian 1, Motherwell 1; Kilmarnk 2, Dunfrmline 1; Rangers 3, St Johnstn 2.
Leading positions: 1, Hearts (14-33); 2, Rangers (15-32); 3, Celtic (14-28).

First Division: Airdrie 2, Stirling A 0; Morton 3 Partick 2; Hamilton 0, Dundee 4; Raith 0, Ayr 1; St Mirren 2, Falkirk 0.
Leading positions: 1, Dundee (15-33); 2, Hamilton (15-28); 3, Raith (16-24).

Second Division: Brechin 2, Clyde 1; Livngston P, East Fife P; Stenhsmr 2, Clydebank 3; Stranraer 2; Forfar 2; Invrnss CT 2, Queen Sth 1.
Leading positions: 1, Clydebank (15-28); 2, Livngston (14-26); 3, Stranraer (15-22).

Third Division: Alloa 4, Albion 0; Berwick 0, Ross Co 0; Cowdnbth 0, Queens Pk 0; Dumbarton 1, Arbroath 2; Montrose 1, E [illegible] 1.
Leading positions: Ross Co (16-31); 2, Alloa (15-30); 3, Arbroath (15-29).

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Sweden are winners by a clean sweep

SWEDEN cruised to their sixth Davis Cup success in Gothenburg when they completed a clean sweep against a United States team weakened by the withdrawal of the world No 1 Pete Sampras. The hosts clinched the title after Nicklas Kulti and Jonas Bjorkman beat late stand-ins Todd Martin and Jonathan Stark 6-4, 6-4, 6-4.

Earlier, Bjorkman defeated Michael Chang 7-5, 1-6, 6-3, 6-3, and Magnus Larsson triumphed over Sampras 3-6, 7-6, 2-1 (retired through injury). The Swedes then went on to win both of the reverse singles matches to seal a famous 5-0 victory.

The delighted Sweden coach, Carl-Axel Hageskog, said: "I am proud of my team. We have a good organisation in Swedish tennis. All the kids want to play tennis."

The last time the US were beaten 5-0 in the final was 1973, when Neale Fraser's legendary Australian team of John Newcombe, Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall and Mal Anderson performed the feat in Cleveland, Ohio.

IRANIAN footballers staged a sensational comeback in Melbourne to edge out Australia in the second leg of their play-off for the last remaining place in next year's World Cup finals. The home side were 2-0 up and coasting in front of nearly 100,000 joyous fans when, with just 13 minutes remaining, it all started to go wrong.

Karem Bagheri, who plays for the German club Arminia Bielefeld, reduced arrears before Khodadad Azizi broke clear for a decisive leveller. The two sides finished 3-3 on aggregate but as Iran had scored more away goals they went through. The success of their national team brought thousands of Iranians rushing on to the streets in their country after the final whistle, while president Mohammad Khatami addressed the nation to celebrate "this precious victory".

MANCHESTER UNITED sailed into the quarter-finals of the European Champions Cup, looking like a team capable of winning it. At Old Trafford they beat FC Kosice 3-0, the same score with which they had begun their Champions League campaign in Slovakia in September. The margin would have been much greater had the English champions' finishing been as good as their ability to create chances.

Andy Cole struck just before half-time when he collected a David Beckham pass and drove home a low shot through the legs of the Kosice goalkeeper. United kept the visitors pinned back throughout the second-half, and their captain and keeper, Peter Schmeichel, was rarely threatened. Then Kosice's substitute, Lubomir Faktor, put the ball into his own net and in stoppage time Teddy Sheringham, who had been off-target a number of times, eased his conscience by making it 3-0.

Newcastle's slim hopes of reaching the last eight in the competition were ended after a 17th minute goal from Giovanni handed victory to Barcelona at the Nou Camp. The Brazilian pounced to beat Shaka Hislop with a delightful chip to ensure the Catalan side recorded their first Champions League victory.

A header from Aston Villa's Dwight Yorke in the third round, first leg, of the Uefa Cup against Steaua Bucharest kept alive the Midlands team's hopes of making further progress in the competition. The omens looked bad for Brian Little's men after Steaua raced into a 2-0 lead before half-time. But up popped an unmarked Yorke to fire home a cross from Savo Milosevic in the 54th minute. The goal earned Villa the advantage of an away goal and left the tie wide open.

BRAZIL'S football legend Pele is the greatest player on the planet, according to a poll of half a million fans in 110 countries conducted via the Internet to find the world's top 25 players. Former Manchester United striker George Best came second and there were five other Britons in the top 10. The survey was confined to internationals who have been retired three years or more, which explains the absence of some of the recent greats, such as Argentina's Diego Maradona.

ENGLAND snooker star Ronnie O'Sullivan beat Stephen Hendry of Scotland at Preston to regain the Liverpool Victoria UK championship title he first won four years ago as a 17-year-old. He pocketed $125,000 for a 10-6 win over Hendry, the champion for the past three years and five times in all.

COLIN McRAE last week became the first British driver to win the RAC Rally three times. It was his fifth world championship victory of 1997 and his 13th in all. But although the Subaru-driving Scot won more rallies than anyone else this year, he failed by one point to stop Finland's Tommi Makinen retaining his world title. "It's nice to win your home rally, but when you've got the championship in the back of your mind, it's small consolation," said McRae, "I'm disappointed but not devastated."

Golf Australian Open

Champagne year for Westwood

David Davies in Melbourne

IN A sensational end to an awfully long season, Lee Westwood beat the world No 1 Greg Norman at the fourth extra hole of a sudden-death play-off to win the Australian Open here last Sunday.

It was Westwood's third win in five consecutive weeks of playing, during which time he has won more than $900,000 and taken his overall earnings this season to $1,562,000. But better than the money have been the wins themselves, all achieved against good fields and with a quiet authority that has become his trademark.

Victories in the Volvo Masters in Spain, the Visa Taiheiyo Masters in Japan and now this prestigious trophy that was first played for in 1904 confirm him as a global player of immense promise.



Westwood: sudden-death victory

He now has a play-off record of 3-0, having won sudden deaths in the Scandinavian Masters and the Visa event last year, whereas Norman has lost play-offs for all four major championships during a career in which he has rarely fulfilled his obvious talent. He is, though, ranked as the best player in the world and over a period of 5½ hours Westwood faced him man to man and stared him down.

Moreover Westwood beat a man who desperately wanted to win. It would have been Norman's sixth Australian Open, matching Jack Nicklaus's record, and his third on the trot, matching the record of Ossie Pickworth, the only man to have done it. Instead Westwood became the first Briton to win since the Honourable Michael Scott, an amateur of course, won the inaugural event and again in 1907.

The 24-year-old from Worksop in Nottinghamshire could hardly contain his delight. He first phoned home and spoke to his mother who, as she has on all six occasions that Westwood has won, burst into tears. He then phoned his manager, Chubby Chandler, in Knutsford, Cheshire, and said: "I think you're about to miss the best night of my life. How much Dom Perignon can you drink in one night?"

